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THE WELLFIELDS.

A Novel.

BY

JESSIE FOTHERGILL,
AUTHOR OF 'THE FIRST VIOLIN' AND 'PROBATION.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

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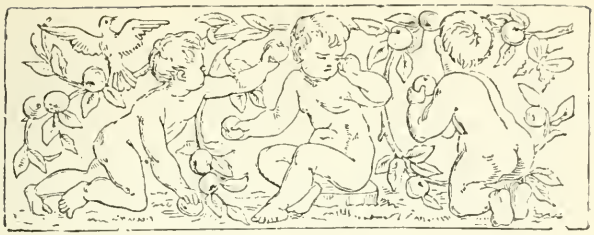


THE WELLFIELDS.

STAGE II—*Continued.*

CHAPTER VI.

IN DANGER.

'Oh Death, that makest life so sweet!
Oh fear, with mirth before thy feet!'

WHEN Nita and Jerome again arrived at the Abbey, they found that Mr. Bolton had returned from Burnham, and that the midday dinner, which was an institution in the family, was waiting for them.

'Have you settled anything?—has Nita helped you?' inquired Mr. Bolton.

'Miss Bolton has been very kind indeed, and has probably saved me from wasting a great deal of my small stock of money,' replied Jerome.

'Ah!' said Mr. Bolton, appreciatively, 'that's always something gained.'

He asked his daughter what she was going to do that afternoon, and Nita said she was going to drive to the town of Clyderhow to do a little shopping.'

'Why Clyderhow? The shops in Burnham are a great deal better.'

'Because I like the drive to Clyderhow,' said Nita; 'and there is a wonderful milliner there. Aunt Margaret got a bonnet from her with five ostrich tips in it, and a bird, and three bows of black satin ribbon, and a great deal of velvet, for the sum of two guineas.'

'So you go by the quantity of stuff you get for your money when you choose bonnets?' asked Mr. Bolton.

'Aunt Margaret does. She likes plumes.

I thought I might perhaps find something sweetly modest and simple, with one feather and one bow, and a little flower or sprig for instance, for next to nothing.'

'Is this shopping considered a secret service affair?' inquired Jerome; 'or may I go too, if I sit quite still while you are in the shop, and promise not to look that way?'

'I am afraid you would think it a great bore,' said Nita quickly, as her face flushed.

'I suppose it was because I love to bore and afflict myself that I asked permission to go,' he answered, with a smile.

'I shall be most happy to take you if you would really like to go. Will you come too, papa?'

'What an idea!—I hope not!' thought Jerome, within himself, and Mr. Bolton was obliging enough to say:

'I?—no. I never drive in the afternoon. I am going to my Italian, as usual.'

But as the carriage was not ordered to be round until half an hour after dinner, Mr.

Bolton proposed to Jerome that they should take a walk round the garden and have a cigar. Nita watched the two figures as they paced together towards the cloisters. The elder man, with the massive lines, broad, sturdy figure, somewhat below middle height, but still imposing in its power and strength; the somewhat bowed back and high shoulders; the round, bull-dog head, with its expression of dogged determination. The younger—Nita leaned against the side of the window and folded her arms, as she contemplated him with a strange mixture of sensations. What a contrast to that dear familiar figure of the man who was noted for his hardness and coldness to others, but who was so gentle, so tender and indulgent to her, and to the few friends who composed their small circle of intimates—a contrast indeed! The new-comer was—unconsciously she recalled those lines in 'Esther'—

> 'He was a lovely youth; I guess
> The panther in the wilderness
> Was not more fair than he.'

'The panther in the wilderness!' That was an evil comparison; surely he was good as well as beautiful. Was it really only yesterday that he had arrived—not yet twenty-four hours ago? And how long would he still be here? And what would the Abbey, everything be, when he was gone? She turned hastily away from the window, and would not venture another look.

The two men paced about the river walk for a time, till Mr. Bolton asked:

'Do you know any of the people about here?'

'I met an old acquaintance this morning—Father Somerville, from Brentwood.'

'Somerville! You know him? Is he any favourite of yours?'

'As to that, I can hardly say. I like what I have seen of him, but know very little of him. I fancy we have many tastes in common. He is a cultivated man, who has seen the world, I think.'

'Ay, ay! he's clever, is Somerville, and

attractive too, I could fancy. I never let any of those gentry inside my house.'

'No?' said Jerome, indifferently. 'I hope you have no objection to your visitors knowing them, for I have promised to go and see him to-morrow.'

'Oh, my visitors do as they please, I hope. So long as he does not darken my doors, it's all one to me what he does. Nita, I am thankful to say, is not of an hysterical temperament, for all she is so slight and delicate. She has never displayed any tendencies to being over-religious, or going in for Ritualism or that kind of mummery; else I should have had to send her to a good sharp school.'

'Miss Bolton has never been to school?'

'No; her mother died when she was two. By that time I was a rich man; and as I knew I should never marry again, I took Nita's education into my own hands. She will inherit my money and my property; and I have given her the education of a man of business. She will know to a fraction what

she is worth; and if she falls into any snares, it will be with her eyes open.'

'That is well,' said Jerome, gravely, wondering a little why Mr. Bolton, on so short an acquaintance, chose to discourse to him on this topic. And with Father Somerville's advice fresh in his mind, he felt interested in that topic—wrongfully interested.

'Your daughter will marry some one who will administer her fortune wisely, it is to be hoped,' he said.

Mr. Bolton sighed. 'I suppose she must marry,' he said, slowly. A girl with that money ought to marry. One has heard of wealthy maiden ladies of large property living alone, and exercising power over all around them; but,' he turned suddenly to Wellfield, 'did you ever hear or read of one, in real life or even in a romance, who was not unhappy? I never did.'

'I really don't feel to know much about the subject,' said Jerome, feeling that they were skirting delicate ground, wondering

more and more that Mr. Bolton spoke thus to him, of all persons.

'Nita has told me about your sister, and your views about her,' he went on. 'I like you for your behaviour, Mr. Wellfield.'

'I?' stammered Jerome, surprised. 'Miss Bolton must have misunderstood.'

'No. She told me you had a half-sister, to whose use you intended to devote what money you had, while you sought for employment for yourself. I like to hear of a man treating his sister in that way.'

Jerome was silent—surprised. He felt his tongue tied. His natural impulse was to please, when his companion showed a predisposition to be pleased. He felt a desire to say something which should still further excite Mr. Bolton's goodwill, and make him—Jerome Wellfield—feel on still better terms with himself. But the thought of Sara Ford rose up, and forbade him to do so. He continued his walk in silence.

'I have a proposition to make to you,' said

Mr. Bolton, suddenly. Jerome turned to him with his lips apart, and a quick inquiring look upon his face. Could it be that Father Somerville had the gift of second-sight?

'It's not a very brilliant proposition; and it is all founded on the assumption that you know nothing of business; no book-keeping for instance, no clerkship routine. Do you?'

'No, I do not; I know absolutely nothing of those things.'

'Well, if I found you capable—excuse my bluntness,' he said, with the same pedantic little air which characterised his speech—'we manufacturers are apt to be a little scornful of a want of practical talent; but if I found you capable, and you would care to try, I think I could find you some employment in my own office. But you would have to begin by learning the very elements of your work from my book-keeper and cashier. If you like to come over to Burnham two or three times a week, for a short time, and try, you are welcome.'

'You are very kind!' said Jerome, astonished; 'I have no possible claim upon such——'

'You do not in the least know my reasons for making you the offer,' replied Mr. Bolton, with a calm superiority that made Jerome feel somewhat snubbed; 'therefore, do not be in any haste to express your gratitude. My book-keeper will soon turn you out a finished article, if you are to be turned out at all.'

'Sublime destiny! The gods might envy me!' thought Jerome, within himself; but he said: 'I shall accept your offer with gratitude. I do not know how I should have found anything, with my ignorance and my utter want of influence.'

'That's right! And in the meantime take holiday till next week, and enjoy yourself. There's Nita's phaeton going round, I see, and the groom; I suppose she will be ready.'

With which laconical dismissal of the

whole subject, he led the way to the house again.

Nita drove a high phaeton, with a spirited pair of roans. In answer to Jerome's suggestion that he should drive she looked so rueful that he laughed, saying:

'If that is the case I shall be only too glad to *be* driven. I am indolent enough for anything.'

'I am glad to hear it,' replied Nita, taking the ribbons. Very soon they were driving at a pleasant speed through the lanes leading towards Clyderhow, whose ancient castle, on a mound, confronted them for a great part of the distance.

'What does Mr. Bolton mean, when he speaks of "his Italian"?' asked Jerome, reflectively.

Nita laughed as she flicked the roans lightly.

'Of course you would not understand,' she answered. 'Italian is papa's favourite weakness. Did you ever see anyone so unlike

Italy as he is? Poor old dear! He always used to read in the afternoons, and one day he was perusing a little book aloud to me, and I was sewing. There came some allusion to "the fiery domes and cupolas of the city of Dis." He asked me what it meant, and I told him about the "Inferno." He said: "That's very fine—those fiery domes and cupolas. I must know some more about it." With which he took to studying Italian, and is now devoted to it. It is very seldom that he fails to give a few hours each day to it. He is translating the "Inferno," in his rough, plodding way. I am glad he finds something to amuse himself with, for he has had a sad life.'

'Sad? He has been unusually successful, has he not?'

'Oh, in money-matters, yes. But my mother died just when he hoped to give her everything she desired—and more. And he was—he was very fond of her.'

'I see! I might have understood that,'

replied Jerome; and then, after a pause, 'Mr. Bolton has been making very kind offers to me.'

'Has he? What manner of offers?'

He told her.

'Do you call that a kind offer?' cried Nita impatiently, as her face flushed. 'How could he suggest such a thing? Oh, really, how hard men can be!'

'Perhaps you think he should at once have placed the half of his possessions at my disposal. Is it not better to be "hard," as you call it, than an idiot?'

'Well, I suppose it is. But life is such a mystery.'

'As how—I mean how exemplified in my case?'

Nita laughed with a little embarrassment.

'I never can explain things. But it *is* a mystery. You a clerk! What an idea! You must feel it to be absurd, yourself, don't you?'

'I have not thought much about it. It has to be done.

'"When land is gone and money spent,"

you know.'

'Pray what would your *sister* say to it?'

'Avice? Well, really, I don't suppose she has any clear ideas as to what clerks are, or do. If I told her I was going to be a tailor, she would think it all right if I said so.'

'Is she that kind of a sister?'

'Yes,' said Jerome, in perfect good faith. He imagined indeed that Avice was that kind of a sister; essentially the right kind of sister. Women ought all to be like that—blind to the faults of those they loved—when 'those' were men. The men to work, the women to admire; the workers to rule, the admirers to submit. It was a beautiful arrangement.

'I daresay it is very nice in her to be like that,' said Nita, 'but if I had had a brother,

I should not have been that kind of a sister at all. I should have told him very plainly what I thought of his doings, and if I imagined that he was degrading himself, I should have told him that too.'

'Would you, at the same time, have provided him with the means of acting up to what you considered a higher standard?'

'It is a *shame!*' Nita burst out almost passionately, after a pause.

How naïvely she showed her interest, Jerome thought, with a little sense of pleased, flattered self-complacency. How delightfully natural she was—and what a curious contrast to that woman whose proud lips had already confessed her love for him: to Sara Ford! His heart suddenly throbbed as he thought of her. Dangerous thought! He must not indulge in it, and accordingly, to turn the conversation, he said:

'You have singular ideas on the subject of brothers and sisters, possibly because the relation is purely a matter of speculation to you.'

'Oh no, it isn't. Jack is my brother.'

'John Leyburn?' he asked, with a feeling of surprise that was not altogether pleasant. Sooth to say, he had forgotten Leyburn for the moment, and here he was suddenly cropping up again in a manner that was obtrusive —thrusting himself in where he was not in the least wanted.

'John Leyburn—yes.'

'Privileged young man! He seems to me, like most cousins, to make the most of his advantages.'

'What do you mean?' asked Nita.

'He takes every opportunity of lecturing you. And you—well, you are consistent, I must own; you do tell him very plainly what you think of him.'

'Of course I do! and as for John's lectures, I am accustomed to them by now. They mean nothing, except that we are great friends—more than cousins; in fact, brother and sister.'

'And how long, if I may ask, has the

fraternity been superadded to the cousinship —and the friendship? It makes a complicated relationship.'

'It never was superadded. It has always existed—for me.'

'Always?' echoed Jerome, vaguely displeased.

'Yes, of course. I am nineteen, and John is twenty-eight. When I was born, we lived at Burnham, and so did the Leyburns. Uncle Leyburn married papa's only sister, and was his greatest friend. They lived at Burnham too, then. John was nine years old then, of course. The first, or one of the very first things I can remember, is his showing me pictures of birds—he is mad about birds, you know—and taking me by the hand for a little walk, and playing with me in general. I suppose I was about three years old then.'

'And Leyburn twelve. He was that age when I knew him, sixteen years ago. They had just come to Abbot's Knoll. Yet I do

not remember his ever saying anything about you. Perhaps you occupied a smaller place in his heart than you imagine.'

'Oh no!' said Nita, with calm conviction. 'He never talks much about things. He would not be likely to talk about me. He always gives his mind to what he is doing at the moment; and when he was playing and learning lessons with you, he would not talk about me. Besides, we were still at Burnham. But he was always kind when he came back to me. John taught me to read, and implanted in my mind that love of light literature which he now pretends to deplore—the great humbug!'

Nita laughed a pleased little laugh, speaking of a tender affection for the absent 'humbug.' The course which the conversation had taken grew less and less pleasing to Jerome. He felt a strong desire to displace John from his pedestal, or at least to make him, in vulgar parlance, 'step down a peg or two.' A spirit of perverse folly took possession of him.

Leaning a little forward, and speaking in a discreetly low voice, mindful of the groom who sat behind, he rested his elbow on his knee, and fixed his eyes on Nita's face, saying :

'Then he has never given you cause to suppose that a sister's affection would hold a secondary place in his thoughts ?'

'You speak ambiguously,' replied Nita, occupied in guiding her horses through a very narrow lane. 'Sister's affection—secondary place ! I do not understand.'

'Are sisters jealous when their brothers marry ?'

'Oh, I see ! Certainly not, if they have any sense,' was the most decided answer ; they may be angry, you know, if the wife their brother chooses is disliked by them ; but if they have no ground for disliking her, they would be selfish and foolish, simply, to be jealous when their brothers married.'

'You say John Leyburn is your cousin and your friend and your brother all in one.

Suppose he took it into his head to get married—he must be lonely in that great house of his by the river.'

'If John were to marry,' repeated Nita, slowly and pensively.

Her hands were fully occupied; for at this moment they were driving down a steep hill, and the roans were fresh. She could not have hidden her face, had she wished to do so. As her eyes met Jerome's, a quick flush rose on her cheek—a flush which grew deeper.

'If she cares for him, there can be no danger in my asking questions; she is in no danger with me,' thought Wellfield, with characteristic indolence, and also with a characteristic wish to find out whether she 'cared' irrevocably for John Leyburn. And he said:

'If John were to marry—yes. What is to hinder him? Would his wife consider him your brother? Would she see it in the same light, do you think?'

'She would be a very nasty girl if she did

not,' said Nita, with a heightened colour and flashing eyes, 'when I should do all in my power to be kind to her.'

'Oh, you would do all in your power to accomplish that? Then you would not mind if John got married?'

'I should mind it very much if his wife were such an odious woman as you seem to think she would be. Stepping in and destroying——'

'The friendship of a lifetime; breaking every social tie, and so on. Let us put it in another light. Suppose he married, and married some one of so generous a disposition as to wish him not to lose his sister——'

'I should not call that generous, but merely decent and reasonable.'

'Well, he marries this decent, reasonable woman, and then you marry. Do you think your husband would look upon John in the light of a brother?'

'Mr. Wellfield, what strange questions you ask!'

'Not at all. You would have to consider the subject when you married.'

'But I am not going to be married. I know papa thinks I shall have to, but I don't intend it at all.'

'Intentions have less than nothing to do with such a matter. When you fall in love with some one, and he asks you to marry him, you will do so of course, since you are neither a nun, nor a lunatic, nor in any way a perverse or ill-conditioned person,' he answered tranquilly, while Nita looked at him in startled amazement, her heart beating with the same strange sense of a thrilling new emotion as she had this morning experienced. In all their nineteen years of brother and sisterhood, John had never dared —was 'dared' the word to use? No—it had never occurred to John to speak to her in such a manner as did this man whom she had first met yesterday. Yet she did not feel resentment towards him, though she tried to think she did, and answered as if she did,

'How can you speak to me in that manner? As if I had no strength of will—as if I were an idiot.'

'Not at all; but as if you were, what you are—a woman, and a good one,' he replied. Then, before she could answer, he went on: 'But I think you want to shirk my question, Miss Bolton. You are afraid to look your position fairly in the face.'

'I don't see it.'

'You have not told me what you would do in case the man you married refused, or was unable to see, John Leyburn in the pure white light of brotherhood.'

'I don't see the use of discussing such wildly improbable contingencies. But'—she suddenly burst into a laugh—'if the worst came to the worst, I should have to sink John to the rank of a friend and cousin. He would have to—well, he would have to manage as well as he could. But you are very unkind to shatter my little day-dream in that way—so wantonly, too! You are the

first person who ever cared to shake me out of my pleasant delusion. I have always looked upon John as a brother.'

'Very pleasant for him, as I think I observed before.'

'Why only for him, pray? I owe far more to him than he owes to me. He has made me better and wiser than I ever should have been without him; not that I am much to boast of in the matter either of wisdom or goodness; but most of what little I have I owe to John. And then, he is almost my only friend.'

'Perhaps that is a matter in which I may find cause for rejoicing?'

'*You!*' echoed Nita, turning suddenly to him, and finding his sombre eyes fixed upon her face. She turned her own quickly away again. 'I don't understand,' she said, a little confusedly.

'Yes, I; even I. If you had had many friends and many claims upon your time and your attention, would you have had leisure to

do all the kind things you have performed for me in the short time since I came here ?—to think all the kind thoughts which I know you have thought ? Should I have been able to endure being under your father's roof if I had found you engrossed with others—looking upon me as an alien and an interloper, instead of treating me as you have done ? It would have maddened me, I think. No ; do not try to deny your own goodness. I have felt it every hour since I met you ; and to one in my position, every kind thought and gentle action on the part of others is as another bead added to one's string of pearls.'

Nita was perfectly silent. Her under-lip quivered a little. Tears rushed to her eyes and blinded her. She had kept up all along a brave show of light-heartedness and carelessness ; but Wellfield had laid his spell upon her from the first moment of meeting him. So long as he merely talked nonsense to her, she could appear indifferent. The moment he touched deeper springs, her heart gave

way, and her outward gaiety collapsed. They were both absorbed—both in danger. Nita was struggling to choke back her emotion ; but the thought of this poor, proud, lonely fellow at her side, disinherited, and grateful even for her goodness, was an overpowering one. Wellfield himself was watching her with an agreeable sensation of power.

At this juncture, while Nita's hands retained scarcely any hold on the reins, they slowly turned a sharp corner in the road, arriving at the summit of a hill, and were suddenly confronted by a panting, groaning, snorting traction-engine, industriously toiling up the hill with two huge trucks full of blocks of white stone ; and urged onwards by its engineer and stoker with loud phrases and ejaculations as if it had been a living creature.

Nita's roans failed to recognise any kinship in this strange and hideous monster. They shied, swerved, plunged for a moment ; then bolting, tore along the short space of level ground at the top of the hill, and proceeded

to rush at full gallop down the next incline. Jerome saw that Nita turned suddenly pale, and set her teeth. She knew what was coming, and he did not. She tightened her hold on the reins, but the roans were young and strong and fresh; her wrists were small and slender. They dashed round the first curve of the road, and from Nita's lips escaped a low 'Ah!' as they saw before them a straight steep hill, at the bottom of which was a deep mlll-dam, then a mill-race, rushing swiftly along; a narrow stone-bridge spanned the stream at the foot of the hill, and on the opposite side rose another hill as steep as the one down which they were tearing.

Jerome quickly laid his hand on her wrist. Personal cowardice in moments like this was not amongst his faults.

'Let them alone!' said Nita, between her teeth. 'They don't know your hand: you shall not touch them.'

Without a word, he put forth his other hand, broke her clenched fingers apart, as if

they had been straws, and took the ribbons from her hold. The frantic animals felt a new hand—a firmer, but a fresh one, and for the moment their terror increased. Down the hill they flew, and the carriage swayed ominously to and fro. Jerome with a side-glance saw the face of the girl beside him, white as death. She did not clutch at the rail, or in any way try to hold herself fast, but clenched her hands before her on her knees, and looked towards the mill-race—towards the deep, green pool above the bridge and the foaming fall below it, and to the grey-stone mill sleeping peacefully on the other side.

Then Jerome perceived that, lumbering slowly towards them on the bridge, were two large lorries, piled with bales of cotton goods, and he knew that to run into them meant death. All the despondency he had felt—all the wish to be rid of life and its unasked-for, uncalled-for burdens disappeared, and only the desire to conquer this impending fate remained behind. He found himself mecha-

nically measuring either side of the road, to see if there was no side-way — no escape from the end to which they seemed to be rushing, and his hold on the reins tightened and tightened till it grew to a strain in which he expended all his strength.

They were within twenty yards of the bridge, and as yet he had seen no way out of it. He saw every slightest action of all around him, and it recorded itself as indelibly upon his consciousness as if he had had hours of leisure in which to observe it all. He saw how the two stolid-looking carters suddenly became aware of the nature of the position— saw them cast up their hands and run to their horses' heads, to pull them as far to one side as possible.

'Idiots!' he thought, 'as if that would do any good!' and even as he thought it, he perceived to the left hand of the road a square embrasure, such as is found in the north of England frequently, though I know not if they exist in the south. In such an

embrasure the stones are piled up which the breakers have to operate upon, and in this particular one were piles of stones already broken: it was walled round, and below the wall the bank of the field sloped steeply down. If he could not rein in the horses, and they leaped the wall, the results were not agreeable subjects of contemplation, but even they would be less dreadful than the gruesome fate proffered by the mill-race and the little stone bridge.

He succeeded in turning the horses into the embrasure, and they, confronted suddenly by a four-feet high stone wall, plunged madly, and attempted to force their way out again. But the hand that held them had at last mastered them. They were curbed. Dancing about in the narrow space, they were forced to contain themselves, till the groom jumped down, and one of the carters, coming forward, took their heads, and Jerome was at last free to guide them back to the road, and to look at his companion.

Now that the danger was over she had broken down. Her face was buried in her hands, and she was shaking with hysterical sobs. Jerome bent over her, removed her hands from her face, and said in a gentle, authoritative voice :

'Were you afraid ? Look up ! It is over now.'

'Oh, my God !' she gasped. 'It was my carelessness. They want careful driving, but they never shy if one keeps a firm hand, and I was not holding them in at all—oh, I thought I had killed you !'

'My dear child, don't let that distress you !' he exclaimed, still in the same low voice.

The two carters were now holding the horses' heads, while the groom looked to see if any damage had been done to the phaeton, and staring with stupid, yet well-meant compassion upon the young lady, whose agitation to them was quite accounted for, women not being reckoned very courageous amongst such as them.

'Don't, don't say so!' she exclaimed, in uncontrollable agitation. 'I shall never forget it. I thought I saw you in the water, drowning.'

There was an ominous sound as of an hysterical laugh mingling with her sobs.

'You must control yourself,' said he, composedly, 'and get out of the phaeton for a short time. We will walk about a little, and go into the mill, and you can rest there.' He jumped out, and took her hand. 'Suppose you alight,' he added, in a voice which was in reality a command.

Nita stepped slowly forth, and wavered a little as she touched the ground. Jerome seated her on one of the stoneheaps, and then got into the phaeton. The horses were now perfectly quiet, but trembling and bathed in sweat.

'Thank you,' he said to the men, giving them some money. 'We need not keep you any longer.'

'Eh, but measter, thou tak's it uncommon

cool,' said one of them, apparently desirous of improving the occasion. 'Dost know thou wert nigh on being done for for ever in yon pond ?'

'I know all about it,' said Jerome, soothingly touching the horses' necks.

'It were a mir'cle as thou comed na' to grief o'er yon wa', too,' pursued he; 'them's skittish critters, I reckon.'

'Skittish or not, I can manage them, and worse than they are. Good-day, friends. I am obliged to you.'

Dismissed thus curtly, the men were fain to move their lorries out of the way, thus leaving room for Jerome, followed by the groom, to drive the phaeton across the bridge and into the stable-yard of the corn-mill on the other side the water. He related what had happened, and soon received the miller's permission to leave the horses there for quarter of an hour, until Miss Bolton was sufficiently recovered to proceed. Then, leaving the man with the horses, he went

back again to Nita, and found her seated where he had left her, and sobbing still now and then.

'My dear Miss Bolton, you must try to control yourself, or you will make yourself ill, and alarm your father needlessly.'

'Alarm my father!' she said, looking up; 'what does alarm matter, after that deadly fear? I tell you, I felt as if I saw your face sinking beneath the pond there—all through me! Oh, it was horrible! It haunts me.'

'It is pure imagination. You were on that side, remember. Think what would have been my feelings if I had had to go home and tell Mr. Bolton that his daughter was drowned!'

'It would have served me right. I knew the horses. I knew they shied if one did not keep them well in.'

'Did you? Well, you see, I managed to restrain them, even after they had shied. Never mind my precious personality, I implore you. You are safe!'

'I—miserable little wretch that I am!' exclaimed Nita, in so deep, so profoundly bitter a voice that he was surprised out of all caution.

'Nay—that is a strange thing to say,' he remarked. 'It would never do for poor old Wellfield to lose all its heirs. What would have become of it if you had been drowned? For my sake, don't talk in that way.'

'Ah!' she exclaimed passionately, 'do not reproach me with that. Do you suppose that I shall ever again have one moment's pleasure in that idea? After knowing you—what do you take me for?'

'I take you to be nervous and unstrung, and over-anxious. And I am sure it is my duty to get you home as soon as possible. Come! The carriage is at the other side of the bridge.'

'Oh, it is impossible to go in the carriage again. I will walk. I am an excellent walker, and it is only four miles.'

'And I?'

'You will walk too, with me. The groom

will bring back the carriage when the horses are fit to come.'

'And what if I think it better to drive, and make a point of your driving with me?'

She looked up in some surprise, and found him calmly surveying her in a manner which left no doubt as to his meaning. He was overruling her, and he intended to be obeyed. She rebelled, momentarily.

'Really, you are very—my nerves——'

'Are quite strong enough to carry you home, and point out to me the way round by Clyderhow, which is the road I intend to take to Wellfield Abbey. There is no reason why you should not do your shopping too,' he added, gently.

'Impossible!' said Nita, in so decided a voice that he at once resolved that it should, on the contrary, become possible. With the exercise of power grew the delight in it. Cost what it might, Nita should go to Clyderhow, and do her shopping, because he wished it. He knew perfectly well that he

had flirted with her, and had drawn her attention from her horses. He knew that she would not have been wrong had she reproached him with having caused the accident; but he was resolved that, far from that, she should continue to accuse herself, and the power and authority should remain on his side as before.

'Can you not trust me?' he asked. 'I will take great care of you. If you refuse, I shall know that you are offended, and have lost all confidence in me.'

His voice was soft, his accent gentle and caressing; the expression on his lips and in his dark eyes had something in it partaking of tenderness. It all subdued Nita's reluctance, and laid her fear, as it were, under a spell. Within the last day life and her own identity had grown strange to the girl. She knew herself no more. But she still hesitated, till Jerome said:

'By this I shall know whether I have lost your confidence or not. If you let me drive

you to Clyderhow, *I* shall not forget to keep a firm hand on the reins.'

Nita rose. 'I will do as you wish,' she said, with a tremor of the lip.

'Thank you, dear Miss Bolton,' he replied, a tone of exultation in his voice, as he drew her hand through his arm, and placing his other hand upon it as if to steady her, he led her across the bridge to the mill.

In a very short time they were in the phaeton, with Wellfield on this occasion in the driver's seat, and Nita, subdued and soothed, was pointing out the way to him.

They presently arrived in the main street of the town of Clyderhow, when Nita made a last abortive attempt to escape from the shopping expedition. But Jerome would not allow it.

'You are quite recovered,' he said. 'You are not going to faint. And you said you wanted a bonnet like your aunt's, with five ostrich feathers in it.'

'I never did!' cried Nita, indignation get-

ting the better of reluctance. 'I think Aunt Margaret's taste in bonnets is horrible.'

'Well, which is the shop? I shall consider myself entitled to go in and preside over the purchase, under the circumstances.'

'That is the shop at the end of the street, if you will go. But I am in no state to buy bonnets.'

'No?' he said, looking at her, intently. 'I should have thought—well, you do look a little pale, perhaps. But I shall be able to tell you what suits you. Here we are.'

He handed her out, and pushing open the shop-door, he stood by for her to pass: then followed, saw her sudden start and recoil, and heard the exclamation:

'Aunt Margaret!'

'The deuce!' murmured Jerome, discomfited for the moment; but instantly recovering himself, he too advanced, and, like Nita, confronted Miss Margaret Shuttleworth.

She looked very stern and terrible. She was standing upright before a tall glass, at-

tired in the full panoply requisite for a visit to town—perfectly upright, and perfectly self-possessed.. One article only of her attire was wanting, and that was her bonnet, which lay on a chair hard by, while over her straight grey hair was visible a little black silk cap, such as elderly ladies wear, or did wear, beneath their bonnets—and which cap, when not yet covered by the superior headdress, imparts a look of hardness to the gentlest countenance. Its effect upon the severe features of Miss Shuttleworth gave an additional terror to her glance, and additional sternness to her eye. A slight young woman held in her hand a bonnet, which she was apparently about to place upon Miss Shuttleworth's head, when that lady, with a wave of the hand, stopped her, and replied to Nita's astonished exclamation :

'Yes, it is Aunt Margaret. What of that ?'

'Nothing, aunt dear. But I was so astonished to see you I thought you had got a bonnet.'

'So I had, but it does not suit me. Put it on now,' to the young woman, who trembled visibly, but who obeyed at once.

It was undoubtedly *the* bonnet, and it sat upon Miss Shuttleworth's head like a plume upon a hearse. No other comparison is for a moment admissible. Slowly, and with dignity, she turned her head this way and that; and before formulating her objections, condescended to greet Wellfield.

'Good-afternoon, Mr. Wellfield. Have you come to help my niece to choose a bonnet?'

'Yes,' said Jerome, composedly.

'I am sure you look as if you would give her valuable assistance in such a matter,' was the reply, ambiguous in its nature. Was it to be considered complimentary, or otherwise? Jerome, with a gravity as imperturbable as her own, said he should feel highly honoured if he could be of any use to Miss Shuttleworth in the same matter. She turned away with a jerk. Having always had a

monopoly in the sphere of disagreeable, if dubious remarks, she did not appreciate this intrusion on a province peculiarly her own.

'Nita,' she said, sharply, 'don't you see what is wrong with this bonnet? It's like a plume on a hearse.'

'It suits you admirably, Miss Shuttleworth,' said Jerome, blandly.

'You must alter the feathers,' said Miss Shuttleworth to the young woman; 'you must make them lie flatter. You understand what I mean. Otherwise I shall never enter your shop again. Now, Nita,' as she removed the bonnet, and reached her hand for her old one, 'what do *you* want? Let us see whether, with Mr. Wellfield's assistance, we cannot find something suitable. Poor John never could have helped anyone to choose a bonnet,' she added, pointedly.

Nita's face flushed. Miss Shuttleworth continued to say disagreeable things, and Nita to grow more and more embarrassed, and the more disagreeable the one became, and

the more confused the other, the more utterly calm and self-possessed remained Jerome Wellfield; nor did he allow a single sharp speech of Miss Shuttleworth's to go unanswered, nor did he abstain from paying a single compliment to Nita, in consideration of the new and discordant element introduced. The whole affair, a mere joke at the commencement, had grown more serious; for Jerome's manner, in proportion as he was goaded by Miss Shuttleworth's shafts, grew more *empressé* towards Nita, while she, confused with the danger they had passed through, intoxicated and bewildered by the look which occasionally met hers when she encountered Jerome's eyes, anxious to conceal all her emotion from her aunt, scarcely knew where she was or what she was doing. Nothing suited her: at last she threw off a bonnet which the young woman had tried her on, and said hastily and decidedly that she would call again another day. She was tired, and could not decide upon anything then.

'Not even with Mr. Wellfield's help?' inquired Miss Shuttleworth, blandly.

'As if Mr. Wellfield cared anything about bonnets!' said Nita, sharply. 'Can't you see when you are being laughed at, aunt?'

'Nita!' ejaculated Miss Shuttleworth, in a tone of the utmost pain and astonishment.

But Nita was already on her way out of the shop. Jerome spoke to Miss Shuttleworth:

'Miss Bolton is upset,' he said. 'We have had a serious accident, and only just escaped with our lives. She is unnerved.'

'I don't understand it at all,' said Aunt Margaret, all her pugnacity gone, and looking as she felt, perfectly bewildered.

'I am sure Miss Bolton will explain later,' he continued. Miss Shuttleworth looked at him, as if wondering who and what he was that he should thus take upon himself to make explanations; but with a stiff 'Good-afternoon,' she went out at the door, and he followed her.

Nita saw her, and asked if she would not drive home with them. Miss Shuttleworth was on the point of refusing with decision and asperity, but something in her so-called 'niece's' look caught her observant eye—a weariness, a whiteness, a languor. She said:

'I don't mind if I do. That's to say, if you leave me in peace to the back seat, for I hate the front one unless I know the driver.'

'Sit where you like, aunt,' was the reply, as Jerome came forward and offered his help.

But Miss Shuttleworth refused, and unaided clambered up to the back seat, presenting a liberal allowance of very spare leg and white cotton stocking to the enraptured view of Miss Bamford's young ladies, who, from the work-room on the second floor, were gazing down upon the proceedings with the intensest interest, and speculating with a burning curiosity as to who that gentleman could be who had driven up with Miss Anita Bolton of the Abbey; who handed her into the phaeton with such assiduous care, and bent

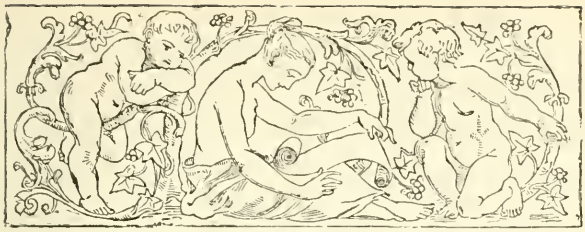
over her with such a look of attention as he spoke a word to her before driving off.

'He looks like a foreigner,' and 'He's very handsome,' were the most definite and the most general conclusions arrived at.

Meantime the phaeton drove off, and arrived at the Abbey without further misadventure. Miss Shuttleworth intimated her intention of coming in and staying supper. Jerome whispered to Nita:

'You will go upstairs and take some rest before supper, *for my sake!* And I will find Mr. Bolton and tell him: no, I will not alarm him too much. Do not fear. Will you promise to rest?'

'Yes,' said Nita, faintly, as he helped her down, and she and her aunt went upstairs together.



CHAPTER VII.

THE WORKING OF THE SPELL.

'Not that the play is worth much, but it is finely acted. . . . But that which did please me more than anything in the whole world was the musique when the angell comes down ; which is so sweet that it ravished me. . . Neither then nor all the evening I was able to think of anything, but remained all night transported.'—PEPYS' *Diary*.

REST and quiet, it seemed, were not to fall immediately to Nita's lot. She conducted Miss Shuttleworth to her room, and sat down in an easy-chair while that lady made her slow and lengthy, if not elaborate, toilette for the evening.

'What's the meaning of all this, Nita ?'

'All what, aunt ?'

'This driving about with young Wellfield,

and having accidents, and losing your temper —*you*, of all people, and insulting your old aunt, and looking miserable ?'

'I don't know why you should seek to attach any meaning at all to it. I was driving carelessly, when we suddenly met a traction engine coming up the hill; the horses bolted, and but for Mr. Wellfield's getting the reins into his own hands—but for his courage and coolness, we should both have been dead now. Surely that is enough to unnerve anyone!'

'Then if you were so unnerved, what induced you to go to the bonnet-shop in Clyderhow ?'

'I overrated my strength, I suppose, and in the joy of being safe imagined myself less shaken than I really was.'

'Humph!'

Miss Shuttleworth went to the drawer in Nita's wardrobe, which was sacred to the caps she always wore at the Abbey. Looking through her store, she carefully selected a

yellow and green one ; the most intrinsically hideous and extrinsically least suited to her style of beauty of any of the collection, and then she returned to the glass to put it on.

'Don't fall in love with Mr. Jerome Wellfield, Nita. Let him fall in love with you if he likes ; but don't *you* do it,' she said, deliberately.

'Aunt Margaret! do you want to insult me?' she asked, sitting up, pale and breathless with anger.

'Not at all. I want to warn you. He is very romantic-looking — reminds one of Byron's heroes, only more agreeable in general society than they would have been ; but depend upon it, my dear, it is all looks. No Wellfield ever had a heart for anyone but himself.'

'Oh, I am so tired of listening to that old story, aunt! You would not say a good word for the Wellfields to save your life. Such constant abuse makes one begin to take the side of those who are abused.'

'Ah, I fear you are very far gone already!'

'How dare you! How *dare* you speak to me in such a manner! Pray, what have you seen in my manner to Mr. Wellfield to make you assert such a monstrous thing?'

'Plenty, and I hear plenty more in your voice now,' was the unmoved, unwavering retort. 'And all that an old woman like me can do, is to keep on warning and warning. Don't fall in love with him, Nita; for if you do, it will bring nothing but disaster. He is not of the kind that makes loving and faithful husbands.'

'When you are quite ready, I shall be glad if you will leave me alone,' replied Nita, composedly; 'or if you do not choose to leave me, I will leave you, and go to some other room. I am tired, and want to rest before I come down to supper. All that you say is utterly without foundation, and it makes me very unhappy.'

'That is odd, if it is without foundation,' said Miss Margaret, fastening on a huge lace

collar with the utmost tranquillity. 'I will say no more to-night, but I shall consider it my duty to repeat my warning at intervals. You are the only young relation I have, and I should think it wrong to do less. All I say now, is, never marry a Wellfield in the hope of happiness.'

With that she left the room. Nita was alone. Perhaps she rested; perhaps not. She threw off her hat, pushed her hair back from her aching temples, and buried her hot and throbbing brow in her hands. She felt no inclination to weep now: only a kind of feverish, breathless excitement, as the scene with the runaway horses again started vividly up before her mind's eye, and she could think of nothing else; could only live over again what had seemed the long eternity of agony she had felt as they rushed down the hill, before Jerome had succeeded in turning the horses aside, and so saving them. It was a scene which she knew would be present with her for days, perhaps weeks. Added to that,

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the subtle inexplicable meaning in Wellfield's eyes, in the tone of his voice, and in the touch of his hand; then the home-coming, and her aunt's calm, monotonous, even-toned voice, as she repeated her warnings—warnings, the remembrance of which made the blood rush hotly to her face, then madly back to her heart, causing it to beat wildly, and leaving her pale and trembling. She felt absolutely ill. Should she send an excuse, and not go to the drawing-room again to-night? No; certainly not. She would not let anyone see how foolish she was. If she remained upstairs John would be uncomfortable, and would miss her; her father's quiet evening with the savages would be spoiled; her aunt would wave her green and yellow cap-ribbons in triumph, convinced that her warnings had taken effect, and Wellfield would think her a poor creature, while she—would not see him, nor speak to him, nor touch his hand again till to-morrow morning. She started up, and began to make her toilette

with unusual slowness and care, and with fingers which she could not compel not to tremble.

Downstairs she found, as she had expected, John Leyburn, as well as Miss Margaret. They were all in the drawing-room, and supper was announced before she had answered her father's inquiries or sat down. This gave her the opportunity of retaining his arm, and walking into the dining-room with him. The meal seemed a long one. Nita was thankful when it was over, and they went into the drawing-room again. Wellfield did not immediately come there. He said he was going for a stroll by the river, and he went out at the open hall-door into the garden. Mr. Bolton was not a demonstrative man: he went to his accustomed table with the reading-lamp, and took up his book. Miss Shuttleworth pulled out a stocking, took a chair (a straight-backed one, as might have been expected), and knitted, with a still rocky severity of countenance. John was arranging cushions on a couch near the window.

'Come here,' he said to Nita. 'You are to lie down, and I will sit beside you.'

'I'm not tired,' said Nita.

'Yes, you are,' he replied, smiling his good, pleasant smile. 'Come here, or I put on my hat and go home this moment.'

'Home! This is as much your home as any other place,' she said, complying with his behest.

'More, since my sister Nita is in it. There!' he added, taking his place beside her as she lay down, and gave a long sigh of relief; 'now tell me what you have been doing this afternoon.'

'That you may give one of your favourite lectures, I suppose,' said Nita, smiling. But by degrees she told him the history of the afternoon's adventure, while it grew dark within the room, and their voices sank lower, and Mr. Bolton read on, and Miss Shuttleworth's needles clicked, clicked, as if they went by clockwork.

'Oh, John! how ashamed I was! I could

not look him in the face,' murmured Nita, at the end of this conversation.

'Ashamed—of what?' asked John, in his slow tones, and looking at her with his near-sighted eyes.

'Of my carelessness, my folly, which so nearly cost him his life!'

'And you yours. I tell you what it is, Nita; it must have been a very engrossing conversation that caused you to loose your hold on the ribbons. Is it allowable to ask what it was all about?'

'Partly about you,' replied Nita, surprised into the admission by this sudden appearance in John of an astuteness with which she had not for a moment credited him.

'About me? What about me?'

She was silent.

'You won't say—or can't. Forgotten, perhaps. I wonder if Wellfield has, too? I'll ask him.'

'He will have forgotten too,' replied Nita

'I thought as much,' said John, and silence fell upon them too.

* * * * *

Wellfield wandered beside the river into the fields—some broad, pleasant, open fields where the river was wide, and formed a broad, shallow, brawling kind of waterfall. To-night there was a full moon, which, as night fell, replaced the day with a softer brilliance. He mused as he walked, not with the heartbeats and the tumultuous agitation which had shaken Nita, but with vague wonder, and a vague repining. Why had he not known of all this reverse of circumstances a few months earlier, before he had met Sara Ford and learnt to love her? If Sara had not been there, imperiously commanding his love, how easy it would have been to accept Father Somerville's outspoken counsel, to make love to Nita Bolton (this with a calm obliviousness or ignoring of the fact that what he had done that afternoon was, if not love-making, at least an excellent imitation of

it), marry her, and once more enjoy his own. It was now quite impossible, of course, and his little experiment this afternoon had just sufficed to show him that had he only been free, it might have been. He did not wish to be free—not he! Who would wish to be free who was loved by Sara Ford? But surely it was not wrong to picture what might have been if he had never met her. He could not tell her of what might have been; but he wished she could know it—could know what his love for her would stand, what hot temptations, what fiery trials it would carry him through unscathed.

And now, how to behave towards Nita? Of course he must not deceive her: he must try to enlighten her on the subject of his engagement; it was only fair. But not to-night: she was too shaken and unstrung to-night to bear more excitement—he tacitly assumed that the revelation would cause excitement to her—to-night he must be gentle and quiet, and let her rest. So he argued

within himself, the truth being that to Jerome Wellfield it was very much easier and infinitely pleasanter to be on good than on evil terms with a woman—with all women not absolutely hideous, and that it was the most natural thing in the world for him to treat any young woman, especially if she happened to be the only one there, as if she were the object of his most special care and attention. Then too, he felt himself welcome at the Abbey, and the sense of this, and the luxury of the sympathy and commiseration, the admiration and the pity which Nita with every look, every gesture, every tone of her voice, offered to him, lulled him into a sensuous inactivity—the kind of inactivity to which his nature was always perilously prone. The pain of planning, and considering, and of conning over adverse circumstances, was great. The pleasure of half-dreamy talk with a woman whom some inner emotion made beautiful for the nonce, and who he felt wore that passing loveliness because he had called it there, and the pleasure of

being worshipped, silently yet subtly, was also great, and very much easier to him than the other alternative. To-morrow, he thought, he would tell her about Sara; to-night he would tell her about herself.

He went into the drawing-room, and found the group which has already been described. Nita's little whispered dispute with John was over, and she lay still. The window was open, and Jerome had entered by it. The evening was warm, and at the Abbey in summer they never drew the curtains; and from where Nita lay, they could see the trees outside shimmering in the ghostly moonlight, and the hoary grey walls of the cloisters beside the river, and nearer, all the stiff quaint flower-beds, and clipped yews, and oddly-shaped shrubs and plants.

Mr. Bolton, at the other end of the room, had a table and a little oasis of lamplight all to himself, and was absorbed in a book of travels. Nita was wont to say that her father was not happy unless he daily made an ex-

cursion to Burnham *in propria personâ;* a descent into Avernus with the assistance of Dante the immortal, and an expedition in the evening into some unheard-of corner of the earth with some traveller, whose tales she averred could not be too wonderful to be credible; in fact, the more improbable, the better.

Except Mr. Bolton's reading-lamp, there was no light in the room save moonlight; and the space was so great that the lamplight was lost in the other rays.

There was silence as Jerome came in, and just glanced at Nita's pale face, which looked almost ghastly in the white moonlight. He paused, and asked her if she felt rested.

'Yes, thank you,' replied Nita, with a little catching of her breath, which John at least noticed. 'I am all right, but John is a tyrant, and says if I get up he will go.'

'Quite right, too,' observed Miss Shuttleworth from her corner.

'Would anyone like a light?' asked Nita.

'Oh, don't light up! This moonlight is heavenly. It only wants music to make it complete,' said John. 'Wellfield, when you were a precocious infant of eleven, at which age I last knew you, you used to play tunes on the piano, and sing little Italian songs, which used to fascinate me. Have you forgotten how?'

'Not utterly, though I have no doubt fallen off from the first engaging innocence of childhood.'

'Well, won't you give us a specimen,' said the benighted barbarian—'if Nita is not too tired?' he added, turning to her.

'I—oh no! if Mr. Wellfield will sing, I should like it,' said Nita, utterly unconscious that she was invoking the most powerful of the weapons of fascination possessed by her hero, and anxious only to preserve a little longer the friendly moonlight.

'Certainly, if one could ever sing at all, one would be able to do so in such a place, and with such surroundings as these, observed

Jerome, carelessly, as he struck a chord or two. 'Ah! your piano is a Bechstein, Miss Bolton; you might have imported it on purpose for me. All I stipulate is, that you will cry "Hold!" in a loud voice, when you have had enough of it.'

He tried his hand with a half-forgotten impromptu of Schubert's, and with each bar that he played the old spirit came back to him. He had not touched a note since the night he had sung to Sara Ford, at Trockenau. Did he remember it? It may be so, but if he did, he carefully abstained from giving any of the songs he had sung on that eventful night. Perhaps the present audience were not worthy. At first he did not sing at all, but wandered on through some strange, cobwebby melodies of Schumann and Chopin—strange melodies, such as had probably never before palpitated through that ancient room, since it was first built, for an abbot's refectory. At first he thought he would not sing at all; but with the flow of sound, and the exercise of

the beloved art, the old intoxication and exaltation stole gradually over him. He paused a moment, struck a couple of weirdly sounding minor chords, and sang the strangely suggestive lines beginning :

> 'O Death, that makest life so sweet !
> O Fear, with mirth before thy feet !
> What have ye yet in store for us ?
> The conquerors, the glorious ?'

If he wished to recall to Nita's mind their perils of the afternoon, he succeeded most thoroughly in doing so. It all rushed over her mind again, overpoweringly, and the whole truth of it. She knew as she heard his voice that never, never had life been so sweet as when, the danger over, she had seen Jerome Wellfield standing at her side, and had heard his voice, though scarcely comprehending what he said.

So he sang on, song after song ; each one with fresh verve and fresh pleasure—with a purer delight in the exercise of his power. Almost at haphazard, he sang the songs and

the *scenas* which he best remembered, just as they came into his mind—Faust making love to Marguerite, and the Troubadour invoking Leonore ; one little German love-song after another—'Du bist wie eine stille Sternennacht' made the tears rush blindingly to Nita's eyes. John Leyburn still sat beside her couch : he leaned back in his chair, and the music wrought pleasant visions in his mind, together with a casual wonder whether Wellfield had never thought of going on the stage, where his voice would certainly have made him a fortune and brought him fame to boot. 'But he would consider it degrading, I suppose,' thought John. 'I fear he is an out-and-out Tory.' Miss Shuttleworth ceased to knit, folded her mittened hands one over the other upon her knee, and appeared at least to listen. The green and yellow cap-ribbons were portentously still, but no sign appeared upon her countenance of either approval or disapproval.

Mr. Bolton, who had at first scarce been

conscious of what was going on, slowly and gradually emerged from an imaginary career over the arid plains of the Pampas, over which he had been in fancy galloping madly, hotly pursued by a number of vindictive South American savages, whose arrows threatened death in the rear, while before him was a deep and rapid river, through which his exhausted horse must swim, if he were to reach the territory of the nearest friendly tribe, alive. He gradually awoke to the consciousness that music of no common order was being made in his daughter's drawing-room. He did not quite understand it all—suddenly he heard Italian words which he recognised—passionate, tragic words :

'Per pietà non dirmi addiò !
Non dirmi addiò !
Dita priva chè farò ?
Dita priva chè farò ?'

He felt that they were beautiful ; their passion and their fire stirred the blood in his veins. He listened to the glorious end of a

glorious *scena*, and then he shut up his book and waited for more. Then it was that Wellfield turned to something quite different, and sang:

'Du bist wie eine stille Sternennacht,
Ein süss' Geheimniss ruht auf deinem Munde,
In deines dunklen Auges feuchtem Grunde,
Ich weiss es wohl, und nehm' es wohl in Acht,
Du bist wie eine stille Sternennacht.'

It is an exquisite romance, and he sang it to perfection. To Mr. Bolton's mind it brought, as well it might, remembrances thronging fast of youth and love, and of a time when he had been young, and when he had wandered through the lanes of Wellfield on his Saturday half-holiday, or for his Sunday out, with a girl on his arm, whose presence was his paradise. In short, Mr. Bolton soon, to his own profound astonishment, found tears stealing from his eyes. He was thinking of himself, and of his own far-back joys and sorrows; he was in a twilight land, where he had long been a stranger—a country which

all of us know, and which yet none of us with bodily eyes have seen—the country which is illumined by 'the light that never was on sea or land'—the country in which strange plants grow—dried flowers to wit, and locks of hair tied up with faded ribbons, and bundles of old letters—the kingdom of romance.

Nita had changed her position; she had turned over on her side, with her face towards the sofa-back, so that it could not be seen. Her handkerchief was pressed against her mouth, her temples throbbed, her eyes were closed. She lay quite still, save that now and then a slight shiver shook her from her head to her feet. If it filled John Leyburn's good honest heart with sweet, vague dreams which he had never known before, if it wafted her dry, business-like, prosaic father back into a nearly-forgotten land of faery and of dreams, what did it not do for her, attuned by nature as she was, to passion and romance? and how was she ever to find peace or freedom again?

The last thing that Jerome sung was Zelter's glorious song, *Infelice in tanto affani.* When he had finished it, when the last piercing, heart-breaking notes had died away, the despairing

'Ho, perduto!
Il mio tesoro!
Tuttu—tuttu fini!'

he rose quickly from the piano, and closed it, observing:

'I quite forgot myself. I am afraid I have been inflicting myself upon you.'

John Leyburn rose too.

'What a lucky dog you are, Wellfield, to have that voice. Amongst more impressionable people than the English, you could charm hearts away with it, I am sure.'

'I do not understand music,' observed Aunt Margaret, rising also, 'and I am going.'

Mr. Bolton's voice then came from afar, pedantic and particular as usual.

'We are very much indebted to you, Mr. Wellfield. You have given us a very great

treat, and I sincerely hope you will favour us in the same way on some other occasion.'

With which he pulled his lamp up to him again, and re-opened his book.

'Nita, I am going. John will see me home,' said Miss Shuttleworth, while John, stooping over Nita, remarked :

'My child, you appear to have collapsed altogether.'

Aunt Margaret had gone upstairs to take off the green and yellow cap ; Nita turned round, and sat up. Her face was pale, and there was an expression of suffering upon it.

'I tell you what it is,' said John, 'you want a little fresh air, Nita. Suppose you and Wellfield come with Aunt Margaret and me to the gate. You are afraid to go alone, you know, being such a coward.'

Nita smiled faintly.

'Here's a shawl,' pursued John. 'I'll put it round your shoulders—so.'

She passively allowed him to fold the little cashmere about her shoulders, and when

Aunt Margaret came down, and handed John her umbrella to carry, she called out:

'Papa, Mr. Wellfield and I are going to see the others to the gate.'

'Folly!' observed Miss Shuttleworth, casually, but no one took any notice of her. They all went out at the window together, Nita with her hand through John's arm.

They went lingeringly through the garden, and down the river walk to the great cavernous gateway called 'Abbot's Gate.' It was indeed a glorious night, one in a thousand, perfect, still, and clear, and around them was everything which can add to the glamour and beauty of a moonlight night.

They parleyed a few moments with John and Miss Shuttleworth at the gate, and then it was shut after them with a loud resounding clang, which echoed through the hollow archway. They were alone again.

'Draw the big bolt,' said Nita, scarcely above a whisper, 'then we shall know it is safe.'

'Safe from whom? Leyburn, or Miss Shuttleworth—or both?' asked Wellfield.

'From all—all evil things,' answered Nita.

'Complimentary to them,' he said, lightly, finding the big bolt, and drawing it without difficulty. He knew it of old, and having pushed it to its place, they stood within the dark space, and looked at the flood of grey moonlight which bathed the river walk that stretched before them.

Jerome drew Nita's arm through his, and they passed out of the darkness into that moonlight. Nita turned her steps towards a small wicket, leading by a nearer path to her home, and the drawing-room window.

'You don't mean to go that way, and leave the river walk, and this glorious moonlight!' he exclaimed. 'That would be a sin. It is not late. Come this way.'

For a moment she wavered; then turned and went with him.

Jerome did not confess it to himself, but

down in the depths of his heart he knew he was doing what was base.

They went very slowly along the grassy walk, on which the dew lay like grey gossamer in the moon-rays, and for a little time neither spoke, till Jerome said softly:

'Will you trust me to drive you another day, Miss Bolton?'

'I? Why not?' said Nita, faintly.

'Will you promise to go out with me another day, that I may be sure you have forgiven me my carelessness?'

'I—is there anything to forgive?'

'I think so. If I had not been talking sentimental nonsense to you, you would not have forgotten to look after your horses, and then——'

'Do not let us say any more about it,' said she. 'I shall never forget it to my dying day, but I hate to think of it.'

'It has shaken you sadly; but will you go out with me another day?'

'Oh yes! To-morrow if you like.

'That is truly good of you,' said he, softly. 'Your shawl is not warm enough,' he added, stopping, as she shivered a little, and he altered it and folded it more closely about her. As they stood there, his eyes looked into hers, and by the moonlight he saw that hers were full of fear, and that her face was white, and her expression one of pain.

'I ought not to have brought you out,' he said, regretfully.

'No; I think I should like to go in again, please,' said Nita.

'You shall, now that I know how good you are,' he answered, lifting up the hand that lay upon his arm, and stooping his beautiful head towards it, he touched the tips of her fingers with his lips. 'What a long time it seems since we walked here this morning,' he added, 'does it not?'

'A very long time,' responded Nita, in a voice of exceeding weariness.

They entered the drawing-room again, and Wellfield, speaking to Mr. Bolton, said:

'I am sure Miss Bolton ought not to sit up any longer. She has been more shaken than she will own by her accident this afternoon, and——'

'Nita, say good-night, and go to bed,' said her father, presenting her simultaneously with a candle and a kiss. 'Here, shake hands with her, Mr. Wellfield. Good-night, child. Off with you.'

* * * * *

Nita, locked in her room, began her preparations for writing. She had inscribed the words:

'How much I have to record! What a day this has been! What a century of events and emotions have been compressed into a brief and fleeting fourteen or fifteen hours. And how little I thought when——'

She broke off abruptly, cast her pen down, and started from her chair, pacing about the room; her hands before her face, and short, tearless sobs now and then breaking from her lips.

'Oh! what shall I do?' she whispered. 'What will become of me? I believe I had better have died before I had seen him. But if he loved me—oh! if God would let him love me—what am I saying? . . . I am afraid. I wish some one were here. I dare not be alone.'

She opened the door softly. On the mat before it lay Speedwell; he raised his head, blinked at her, and moved his great tail up and down slowly.

'Speedwell, come in!' she whispered, beckoning to him. The mastiff obeyed. Nita locked him into the room with her, and as he sat looking up at her, inquiring why she was troubled, she cast her arms about his faithful neck, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

When the paroxysm was over, and she looked at him, tears were coursing down Speedwell's nose too.

'You will never tell anyone, will you, Speedwell?' she muttered. 'You are wiser

and stronger than your mistress, old dog and old friend.'

Speedwell watched beside the bed on which his mistress passed a restless night; her brain full of the rapidly changing images of alternating hope and anguish, rapture and despair and love, with which her day had been filled.

When morning came, and she looked in her glass, it showed her a very wan, white face, with dark rings round the eyes, and a piteous curve about the lips—a face changed indeed from that which, if not beautiful, had given joy to many, and had hitherto been thought a sweet face by those who loved and knew it best.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST OF BRENTWOOD.

'I found myself in a richly adorned temple, in which incense was burning, where lights were twinkling above the altar, and where the music was such as to ravish away my very senses. And as I fell upon my knees, the choir, which from its sweetness I could have thought celestial, repeated many times in moving accents, the wish of my heart—so that it became verily a prayer—and I poured out my soul in unison—*dona nobis pacem.*'

THE following day was Sunday, and on the arrival of the letters, Jerome found two for himself, one bearing the Elberthal post-mark, the sight of which made his heart beat. The other was directed in a hand he did not know, but turning it over, he saw printed on the flap of the envelope 'Brentwood.'

'It must be from Somerville, of course,' he thought, opening it quickly, and his conjecture was right.

'My dear Mr. Wellfield,

'Will you, if you have no other engagement, and if the evening is fine, come up to Brentwood to the evening service? I should like to present you to the Superior, and we shall be happy if you will remain and sup with us.

'Sincerely yours,

'Pablo Somerville.'

This invitation gave him a sense of relief, inexplicable, but strong. With Father Somerville he felt entirely at his ease; felt that he was understood, was not taken to be a hero, or anything else that he really was not. Here, at the Abbey, he had the very opposite sensation. He knew that he was looked upon in the light of an unusual and remarkable phenomenon. He knew, for he had a keen,

sympathetic intuition in such matters, that Mr. Bolton treated him with a respect he was not wont to show to strangers—especially penniless ones—that even Miss Shuttleworth's pointed and elaborate incivility arose chiefly from a feeling she had that he was dangerous. John Leyburn alone appeared to preserve his natural, deliberate, unembarrassed manner.

Nita—Jerome felt very uncomfortable when he thought of Nita—very uncomfortable as his eyes wandered from Sara Ford's handwriting to Anita Bolton's face, which face he saw was pale, and the reason of which pallor he knew as well as if some one had arisen and proclaimed it aloud to him. They were all, without exception, under a false impression in regard to him. How easy, exclaims a devoted adherent of right-doing, to remove that false impression! How very easy casually to let them all know that he was promised and vowed to another woman! Was not the excuse there in the shape of Sara's letter? Why not mention that it was

from the girl he was engaged to? What easier? Ah! what to some natures? And to others what more difficult? Unfortunately it was difficult to Jerome. He did resolve, as he looked at Nita that morning, and saw the difficulty she had in meeting his eyes, that he would not make love to her any more; that he would be cold to her even. Such natures as his are given to making such resolutions in momentary silence and reflectiveness; and when the moment comes for not making love, for displaying coldness, they never recognise it; it is always 'not now, another time!' And this, not for fear of hurting a woman's feelings, though they would say so, even to themselves, but because the flattery of a woman's love is too sweet a dram to be forborne. It was easy for Jerome Wellfield as he sat exchanging commonplaces at the breakfast-table with Nita—and Nita's father—to swear to himself that such commonplaces alone should be the yea, yea, and the nay, nay, of his entire conversation with her. When the moment came,

in which he found himself alone with her, or apart with her, the old trick of the eyes, the old smoothness of the tongue slips back again, as if by some fatality. So long as she believes him he will make love to her ; so long as she will worship him, he will accept the worship, and will delight in it—and could not refuse it when it was offered, were the alternative a plunge into the nethermost abyss of remorse —into the scorching flames of discovery. Therefore, it may be predicted with mathematical certainty that he will read that letter that lies before him ; that it will both charm and distress him—the first by its worship of himself ; the next by making him see that the writer believes him as single-hearted as she is herself. After reading it, he will vow to himself, much and more, 'I must tell her—I will tell her.' And he will go to her, and will tell her—how precious her sympathy is to him, and how perfect is her nature, and he will look love, if he does not speak it.

While he was longing to open Sara's letter,

and vowing great vows to undeceive Nita as early as might be, she said:

'We are going to church this morning, Mr. Wellfield. Will you come too, or would you prefer to stay at home?'

'I will go with pleasure,' he answered. Be it observed that in Wellfield's nature there was not, and never had been, one grain of scepticism in matters religious. It is true he was utterly indifferent so far as practice was concerned, and that, according to the company he happened to be in, he would, for weeks or months at a time, either go diligently to some place of worship once, or even twice each Sunday, or never enter one at all, or even think of the matter. Where he went was also almost entirely a matter of indifference, except that he never frequented conventicles, not at all because he disapproved of the tenets held by their supporters, of which he knew nothing, or less than nothing, but because the services held in them were so bald and tame, so ugly and ascetic; they ap-

pealed in no way to his æsthetic sense, but rather repelled it. Anywhere where he could have a fine service, hear fine voices read or intoned, and where there was good music in which he could join, was acceptable to him, and all his life he had wandered indifferently whither friends or fancy led him, to services and churches of all kinds, but perhaps more to Roman Catholic ones than to any others. As a small child he had always attended mass with his mother, had learnt to say his *Ave Maria* and his *Pater Noster;* and these remembrances remained with him; part of the influences of Italy. He remembered them as he remembered his mother's dark eyes, and gem-like brilliance of beauty—like a delicious dream of another world.

All this, however, did not prevent his putting on his hat and walking with Nita and her father down the river walk, across the field to the church. They sat in the stalls, one row of which 'went' with the Abbey property. How well he remembered

it all. If the service were not of the most elaborate or beautiful, there were other objects in Wellfield Church which made up for a somewhat bald ritual. There was for instance, much charm for an æsthetic soul in the magnificent carved work of the splendid old black-oak stalls in which they sat, and in the many other odd old pews and strange devices dotted up and down. The singing was of a nature to make the blood freeze in the veins of him who had any pretence to being a musician. The choir consisted of a number of young men and women accommodated with seats in the west gallery, a conspicuous position, close to the organ; and to do justice to their exalted places, no doubt, they were in the habit of attiring themselves in the very height of the Wellfield fashion, which fashion, for brilliance of hue and boldness of contrast, would have put to shame Solomon in all his glory. Jerome found himself seated next to Miss Margaret Shuttleworth, who looked

uncompromising. In the dim distance he saw John Leyburn, alone in a great square carved oak pew, the pew that belonged to his house, Abbot's Knoll, for free and open benches were as yet unheard of in Wellfield.

The service over, they nearly all met at the door, as is the fashion with country congregations. Jerome, having ascertained that the family dinner did not come off for the space of an hour and a half, or more, said he was going for a walk, and wandered off in the direction of the wooded hill, the Nab, there to read his letter, and make good resolutions with regard to Nita, with an undercurrent of wonder, all the time, as to what Father Somerville would tell him he ought to do, if he knew all the circumstances of the case.

Nita and John Leyburn, not noticing where Jerome went, presently strolled off in the same direction. Mr. Bolton remained with his cousin, Miss Shuttleworth, patiently

waiting till she had finished her discourse with an odd-looking character, no less a personage than the sexton of Wellfield church.

'I'm sorry to hear, Robert, that you got too much on Monday.'

'I fear I did, Miss Shuttleworth,' he said, looking rather sheepish.

'It is deplorable,' said Miss Margaret, shaking her head. 'How was it? for your wife could give me no proper account of it, and unless you can clearly prove that you were led away, I shall be obliged to show my displeasure this time. I shall have to withdraw my allowance to Mary.'

Mary was his sick daughter.

'It were aw along o' th' brass band contest, Miss Margit; 'twere, for sure.'

'The brass band contest, Robert? I don't see how the brass band contest could make you get tipsy and tumble into the grave you were digging, as I heard you did. Is it true?'

'Ay, every word on 't's true, Miss Margit —more's th' pity.'

'Shame on you! But how did it happen?'

He twirled his hat round by the brim, and a lurking smile and twinkle of the eye betrayed his inner consciousness that the affair had a ludicrous as well as a 'deplorable' side.

'Well, Miss Margit, I'd getten th' grave above half-finished, when I yeard th' brass bands comin' along to th' Plough Inn, and it were th' middle o' th' arternoon, and I were summan (some and) dry, and I were vary anxious for to hear who'd won, yo' know, so I flings down my spade, and I went off to th' Plough, and theer I found 'em all—every man on 'em. And we geet to talkin', and first one offert me a drop, and then another, till I geet to' much—I'm free to confess it. I remembered o' of a suddent as th' grave were to be ready again th' mornin', and I jumped up, and ran to th'

churchyard, and set to work to dig wi' a will. And whether it was th' heat—it *were* gradely hot—or whether I were fuddled, I know nowt about it, but I turned dizzy all of a moment, and I tummled down, and fell fast asleep. Th' graves were o'er yonder, at th' fur end o' th' yard, and mappen that were why no one seed me, and wakkened me oop, but when I did awake, it were well-nigh dark, and I couldna tell for t' life of me, where I were. So I sets oop and looks around, and there in the far distance I yeard th' sound of a trumpet. My heart louped to my mouth, and I thowt, "Robert Stott, it's last trump; up wi' thee!" and I ups and clambers out, and stands still. Ne'er a soul could I see, and aw' were as still as death. Findin' mysel' alone, I took courage, for I knew as the more part should be o' th' wrong side i' th' day o' judgment—our parson's olez said so, and I've a feelin' as he's reet. Then again I yeard th' trumpet-blast, and I looked around again. "What, no more

righteous ?" I said to mysel'. "Eh, but it's a poor show for Wellfield." '

'*Robert !*' was all that Miss Shuttleworth could ejaculate, horror-struck.

'Yes, Miss Margit ?'

'What you say proves you to be in a very unsatisfactory frame of mind as regards religion.'

'Well, ma'am, I've olez agreed gradely well with th' owd vicar. It's a grand thing to be *reet*, Miss Margit—a grand thing it is—and *we're* reet. I see my son-in-law a-calling to me, so I'll say good-mornin'.'

With which, before she could stop him, Robert Stott had made good his escape.

'Now, perhaps you'll allow us to go to the Abbey, cousin,' observed Mr. Bolton, shaking in a volley of silent chuckles.

'I am astonished at you, cousin,' was all the answer he received, as Miss Margaret, with her head in the air, floated towards the wicket leading to the Abbey.

But her head suddenly went down again

as she recalled her niece's words yesterday, 'Don't you see when you are being laughed at, aunt?'

'Is it possible that Stott was laughing at me? Surely he would not have such insolence!'

Pondering upon this tremendous topic, she had eyes and ears for nothing else until Mr. Bolton observed:

'You'll walk into the river, cousin, directly. Would you like to go in, or shall we walk about till the young ones come back?'

'Oh, they are all off, are they?' she said, raising her head, and collecting her faculties again. 'That gives me just the opportunity I wish for. Do you know what you are doing, Stephen?'

'Doing? As how?'

'In harbouring that young Wellfield in your house?'

'I invited him to stay a few days, if that's what you call "harbouring," cousin.'

'Pooh! You know what I mean. Had

you no thought for the probable consequences when you committed that rash act ?'

'What do you mean by the probable consequences ? At present they seem to me to consist in my having become better acquainted with Mr. Wellfield, and feeling considerable respect for him.'

'Respect ! respect for a Wellfield ! I am astonished at you. *You* have become better acquainted with him ; but not so well acquainted with him as your daughter.'

'My daughter—you mean that Nita admires him—or that he is likely to fall in love with her ?'

A fine sneer played about Miss Shuttleworth's lips.

'He is very likely to fall in love with Nita's money. As for herself, no Wellfield ever cared for any person but his own.'

'You are prejudiced, cousin, as we all know.'

'Will you deny that when two people are

thrown together as Nita and that young man are likely to be, it is probable that nothing will come of it on either side ?'

'It is not probable,' he returned, quietly.

'Do you mean to say that you will allow Nita to fall in love with him, and do nothing to prevent it ?'

'It is a matter I do not choose to discuss. There are other probabilities on the cards besides the probability of Nita's falling in love with him.'

'If that's your way of looking at it, I've done,' replied Miss Margaret, mightily offended, and prancing onwards with her head higher than ever. 'Indeed, I think I will go into the house.'

'As you please,' he returned. 'I am going to stroll about here for a short time.'

Miss Shuttleworth stalked onwards in dudgeon. Mr. Bolton was left pacing by the river walk.

'It is an odd complication,' he was reflect-

ing, 'and it would be an odd result if I should have toiled all these years to place my child and this place into the hands of one of the old stock once more. But it must be as will make the child most happy. As for him, he may make an admirable gentleman of property and an excellent husband, but he will never make money. He may learn sufficient of business habits to be able to keep it together when it is there, but the business he conducted would soon stand still. Still, if he is honest, and honourable, and a gentleman in thought and feeling, as he appears to be, and the man who will make my little girl happy—which I begin to think is the case—there seems a sort of appropriateness in his being a Wellfield. It was through no sin of his that he lost the place, and from all I can hear he has been perfectly well-conducted. At least, I can see no reason for forcibly separating them, and why should not my daughter marry a high-born gentleman? She is worthy the best in the land.'

More meditations, all tending in the same direction—more pacing to and fro, until, raising his eyes, he saw his daughter approaching, accompanied by Jerome Wellfield. Nita's eyes were bright, and there was a soft flush upon her cheeks. She looked undeniably pretty. Wellfield looked as he always did—handsome with a beauty which is given to few men to wear, stately and high-bred more than most men.

'They make a goodly couple,' thought the fond father. 'She is a winsome lass, and he—yes, by gad, there is something in birth and breeding. He looks the right master for a place like this.'

With which jumble of fatherly pride, commercial astuteness, and prudent calculation, he advanced to meet them.

'John has gone home to dinner,' said Nita; 'he's coming down in the evening.'

* * * * *

Wellfield's reflections, as he walked towards Brentwood, were far from being agreeable.

He had Sara's letter, with its calm acceptance of the fact that he loved her as she loved him —she spoke of it as if it had been one of the ordinances of nature—unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. She showed him at the same time how very much she loved him, and that stroked his self-complacency the right way; but the other feeling chafed him. Inevitably, from his character, from the inborn, inherited tendencies of his nature, he asked himself, 'What right had she to accept so unquestioningly his love—to assume that nothing could change it—nothing shake it?' She little knew the temptations that were cast in his way—temptations from which she was free. He forgot how persistently he had pressed the point upon her. What would she do in case some other man were to fall in love with her, as he was almost sure to do? Yet, as he remembered her few strong simple expressions of devotion to himself, the whole extent of his love for her rushed over him; he seemed to

be once more under the potent spell of her individuality—of her noble, upright, simple nature; to feel once more the magic of her beauty, which answered so harmoniously to her nature, as some Beethoven symphony answers in the grand and original carving of its outward form to the grand and original fire of the thoughts which gave it birth—as the greatest poems take the most perfect shape, and are written in the most melodiously arranged words. Yes, he knew he loved her—he knew that all the higher part of his nature loved and worshipped her; but he knew that she had clear eyes, and that oppressed him; and he knew that had those eyes beheld him, as he sat alone with Nita Bolton by the river that afternoon, they would have scorched him; had they seen Nita's downcast face, and watched her embarrassed replies to some of his questions, or beheld the still more embarrassed silence which had been to him so eloquent, they would—how would they have looked? Never

at him again with the light of love in them. He no longer said to himself that he would tell Nita to-morrow: he had gone too far for that. All he could do now was to drift.

In this uncomfortable frame of mind he ascended the slope which led to the gates of the drive through the park at Brentwood. Right before him stretched a perfectly straight road, some quarter of a mile in length, between two green meadows, each of which meadows was bordered by a belt of dark firs. Many persons were, like himself, wending towards the mass of grey buildings, and the great stone gate-posts, and the two huge square fish-ponds, which lay at the end of this long road. A bell, too, was tolling somewhere amongst the mass of buildings—some old, some new, some not yet finished, which form the outward portion of the great Jesuit College of Brentwood. Arrived at the entrance, between the two fish-ponds, he inquired his way to the church, and was

directed where to go. Entering by a side-door, by some mistake, he found himself in that portion of the church reserved for the students of the college. Pausing, and looking round, he was accosted by a tall, grave-looking 'philosopher'—a Spaniard, evidently—and, to judge from outward appearances, no small personage by birth and breeding. Accepting his offer of a place, Jerome found himself between the Spanish youth and another foreigner in one of the front benches facing the high altar. There was a dreamy calm over everything until the service began. The congregation came slowly dropping in, chiefly rustics, countrymen, women, and children, and here and there some group or isolated figure of unquestionably higher rank and station.

With the different stages of the service Wellfield forgot his troubles. It brought back associations of youth and pleasure, of music and student-days—associations in no-wise connected with Wellfield, with his

present life and surroundings—rather it led him to forget them, which he was only too willing to do. The ritual was gorgeous, the music magnificent, the choir and the organist first-rate. It soothed him, calmed him, eased him, as all such observances must soothe and ease those who can accept the principles which give rise to them. On their knees they knelt, and again and again sounded, in strains of exquisite supplication, the great cry, common to all humanity—*Dona nobis pacem!* Ay! give us peace; though every moment we are off our knees we may be doing, thinking, planning, hoping that which will destroy peace, yet, Power that we invoke, heed not that, but, since we fall on our knees, and set it to music, and are for the moment in earnest—'Give us peace!' It is a cry common to all; and those who pin their faith on creeds imagine that it will be answered. Perhaps the conviction saves some from madness, and others from blank despair—lulls some consciences, shoots a ray of hope into

some hearts—makes their lives bearable to those who believe that peace comes from a source outside themselves—but remains a delusion all the same. To-night, it had the effect of a drug upon Jerome Wellfield's conscience. *Dona nobis pacem!* Surely there would be some way 'shown' to him out of it all. *Dona nobis pacem!* This strife could not be meant to go on for ever. For once in his life, he prayed—prayed from his very heart—'Give us peace!'

Somerville, who took no part in the service, watched him curiously from his place, in a somewhat retired corner. The keen-eyed, quick-witted priest rapidly noted the points of resemblance between Jerome Wellfield and his two companions. Both the latter belonged to old Roman Catholic families, and bore names of world-wide celebrity; both were amongst the eldest and most advanced of the students, and already showing signs of manhood, in deep voices and a dark line on the upper lip; they might, therefore, justly be compared

with Wellfield. All three had the same high-bred pride of bearing, the pale, rather disdainful, features; the same distinctly haughty carriage of head and shoulders—to each and all was common a certain dreamy *schwärmerisch* expression, indefinable, but palpable—an expression which any acute observer must have noted.

'Anyone coming in, and not knowing the circumstances,' thought Somerville; 'knowing only that this is a Jesuit seminary, and that over there the students sit, would inevitably say, "What a thoroughly Roman Catholic-looking trio—especially that eldest one in the middle!"' He watched with more intentness still. Father Somerville was zealous for his faith—he was ambitious too; he knew that in his Church services of a tangible kind met with tangible rewards. To say that he then and there formed a scheme, which he decided at all hazards to carry out, would be to do a clever man egregious injustice. Simply, he had a subtle brain and a

natural turn for intrigue, which of course his education and career had fostered. He saw possibilities—possibilities which excited his active brain, and kindled his ambition and imagination.

'They were Catholics before—till not more than a hundred years ago,' he thought. 'His mother was Catholic of the Catholic. Why not Catholics again, if anything? Who knows? Time will show.'

The service over, there was a sermon, and presently the congregation broke up, and streamed out into the open air. The students marched off in procession, and departed by a side-door. Somerville just paused as he passed, to whisper to Jerome:

'If you will wait in the garden or on the playground, I will join you in a few moments.'

And following this direction, Wellfield went out by the west-door, and took his way to the broad space on the brow of the hill,

which seemed to form quite a little tableland in itself, and which was the playground of Brentwood College. He paced about there, and watched the crimson and purple pomp of the August sunset. It was a scene such as one rarely beholds, rendered remarkable, too, by ancient historical associations, and by the present fact, that, though within twenty or thirty miles of all the great manufacturing towns and most powerful radical centres of Lancashire, it was a Roman Catholic stronghold; in matters of religion a conservative nook, where change crept on leaden foot. From this elevated vantage-ground Wellfield saw many things associated with his own family and its history. There was the ancient grey manor-house and church of Millholm; in which church was a 'Wellfield chapel,' where ancestors of his had their marble tombs, including that of the boy, the last direct heir male to Brentwood, who had come to his death by eating poisonous berries in a wood. It was after his death that

Brentwood had passed into the hands of the Jesuits. From his present standpoint he could see the three rivers, each more beautiful than the other, which came very near to meeting, and which had given rise to the old rhyme which Nita had repeated to him yesterday :

> ' Hodder and Calder, and Ribble and rain,
> All meet together in Millholm demesne.'

To his right, eastwards, the immense bulk of Penhull closed up all prospect beyond. Northwards were bleak Yorkshire moors. At the foot of Penhull was the little conical mound on which stood all that was left of old Clyderhow Castle. Southwards, the smoke-bedimmed moors round Burnham, and Black Hambledon, showing out grimly against a background of sky that mingled hues of copper and flame and smoke. And by scanning intently the ground just below Wellfield Nab, and the course of its river, he could discern where the village and Monk's Gate

stood. A fair heritage, and it might have been his again, but for——

'I am very sorry to have kept you waiting, Mr. Wellfield,' said Somerville's voice at his elbow. 'Will you not come into the house?'

'Thank you. What a prospect this is!' said Jerome, pausing, 'and what a phenomenon this place of yours, too; in this district of all others.'

'Within call, you are thinking, of those centres of civilisation and cultivation, Blackburn, Burnley, "proud Preston," and even the monarch of them all, Manchester,' chimed in Somerville, a tinge of sarcasm in his tones. 'Yes, it is a phenomenon, I admit. I hope it did not bore you to come to our service.'

'Bore me? On the contrary, I have enjoyed it exceedingly.'

'Won't you come into the house? I want to present you to the Superior, and you will remain to supper with us. Come and

look at our libraries; it will pass away an hour until we can see the Superior.'

Jerome followed him, and the hour that Somerville had spoken of was passed agreeably enough, in wandering through all the wonderful rooms full of wonderful things which the priest showed him. There was a quiet stillness over everything—a Sabbath calm. The rays of the setting sun made beautiful the great banqueting-hall of the old mansion, which was now the principal refectory for a hundred and sixty students and their accompanying tutors, priests, and professors. They wandered through the libraries, whose cedar-wood book-cases filled the air with a pleasant aromatic smell; and where one saw here and there a figure in a square cap and a long cassock standing silent amongst the wilderness of theology and black-letter in the one room—of patristic lore in the second—of miscellaneous modern thought in the third. But to those who know Brentwood, the repetition

of its wonders waxes tedious—to those who know it not, it must be tedious also. Wellfield did not know it, and the charm which, when it was shown to him by so skilful an exponent as Father Somerville, it was sure to cast over him, was a strong one.

Indeed, it is a place which cannot fail to impress all who see it with a sense of wonder and admiration—it is a little town in itself—a centre of learned leisure, of Jesuit subtilty, of refined cultivation, of courtly hospitality towards those admitted within its precincts, and all this planted upon the slope of a bleak Lancashire ridge of hill, facing another bare hill which divides it from one of the most radical of radical boroughs. It was, as Wellfield had said, a remarkable phenomenon.

He was presented to the Very Reverend Father Superior. He was courteously and graciously entertained at the simple but abundant Sunday evening supper, and he heard and shared in conversation in which he

felt thoroughly at home—conversation adapted with skill and tact to his own tastes and habits. He forgot his dilemma, until, when it was almost ten o'clock, he rose to take his departure.

'I will accompany you for a part of the way,' said Somerville, and after wishing his hosts good-night, Jerome set out with the companion whose influence he felt already to be strong, but which was in fact far stronger than he knew, or would have liked to know—strong because it was the influence of a calm, concentrated, yet flexible nature upon one which, though variable was not flexible; though passionate, was not strong.

Still broad moonlight, they had no difficulty in making their way through the scented lanes and between the tangled hedgerows. They walked onwards, discoursing of different things, until they had left Brentwood more than a mile behind, and found themselves at the top of a hill, from which, looking

down, they could see all the village of Wellfield ; its old church ; the winding river, and the Abbey walls and gates slumbering in the moonlight. They paused, and looked down upon it.'

'It is very beautiful,' observed the priest at last.

'God knows it is,' responded Wellfield.

Another pause, when Somerville laid his hand upon the other's shoulder, and said, in a slow, reflective, earnest voice :

'I wish to heaven that you were master there !'

Wellfield laughed a short, mirthless laugh. He knew what was meant, and the impulse to speak freely was strong—so strong that he followed it.

'That will never be. You have some power of divination, I am certain. Since your conversation with me yesterday morning, I have been convinced that what you said is true. I *might* be master there if I—chose.'

'Then why not?'

'Because to do it, I must sell myself body and soul. It would be hell upon earth for her—and for me too.'

'But she is not a woman with whom it would be hell upon earth to live,' began Somerville, as if surprised.

'Heavens! no. She is all that a girl ought to be, I think, and good as only such girls can be. It is not that.'

'Surely you don't stick at the fact that you are not desperately in love with her? In your position that would be a folly of which I cannot believe you capable.'

'No; such an idea never entered my mind.'

'Then, since we are speaking upon the matter—since you broached it yourself, let me tell you seriously, that, if there is not any real tangible impediment in the way, I think you do wrong in every way not to take the goods the gods offer you.'

Wellfield was silent for a prolonged space,

till at last he said, slowly, reluctantly, as if the words were wrung from him :

'Honour binds me elsewhere.'

'So! Another lady in the case!' was the reply, given with a lightness of tone, an absolute approach to a laugh, which surprised Wellfield, and almost gave him a shock. He had expected his words to reduce Somerville to silence to produce an apology for indiscretion. The fact that nothing of the kind happened, had a subtle effect upon his own mental attitude. Somerville went on, with a tact and an audacity combined which were certainly remarkable :

'Pardon me, I ask no names—indeed, I would rather you mentioned none ; but tell me, if you do not very much mind, this lady to whom honour binds you—is she rich ?'

'No.'

'Is she likely to be ?'

'Not unless she becomes so by her own exertions.'

'And there is no definite prospect of marriage for you?'

'As you may suppose, none—not even an indefinite one.'

'I could suppose so. Well . . . remember I speak quite without knowledge of the circumstances, but knowing exactly what I do—no more and no less, I should say, I hope that lady is aware of what is being sacrificed for her sake.'

Jerome was perfectly silent. Perhaps he was not conscious of acting like a cowardly hound. He did not realise, for Father Somerville was too clever to allow him to do so—he did not then realise that the woman who was his promised wife had been lightly spoken of—to him—and he had lifted neither hand nor voice in protest.

'That is my feeling,' repeated Somerville; 'but after this, I have no right to urge you. But I repeat my words—I would to heaven that you, Jerome Wellfield, were master here! Good-night!'

Wellfield wrung his hand, and took his homeward way. Somerville passed slowly back towards the Brentwood Park, his hands clasped behind his back, pondering, lost in thought, till at last he gave a sudden start and stop.

'Fool that I am!' he murmured. 'Instead of giving up the marriage, I should do all in my power to urge it on. This woman in the background is——I wish she were out of the way. And yet, if I could marry them in spite of her. . . . A man and wife who live together in a hell-upon-earth *must* have resort to a third person for help, and it should go hard if *I* were not that third person. Upon my soul, I like the scheme. If Wellfield Abbey and the money of that insolent heretic who lives there now were once more under the control of the Church—it would be a meritorious act in whoever had brought it about—another jewel in Our Lady's shrine, and,' with a faint, sarcastic smile, 'a step upwards for Pablo Somerville. The young

man himself is a Wellfield. If I can make him act for our advantage, by playing upon that self of his, it is easy to bring out the whip afterwards, when he has gone too far to retreat.'

CHAPTER IX.

'DON'T FRET.'

AUGUST was verging slowly towards September; the hues of the flowers were more gorgeous and more autumnal; the foliage of the trees had taken a soberer, more mature tinge. The weather was sultry and still, as it is wont at that time of the year to be.

One afternoon, Nita Bolton, book in hand, and Speedwell by her side, paced slowly up and down the river walk, looking a little pale and drooping. Always soon and easily tired; never of the strong, robust temperament, she had looked of late more delicate than usual,

and when questioned as to the reason of her heavy eyes and pale cheeks, had replied that 'it was the heat—the sultry weather ; the Abbey stood so low ; and the end of the summer was, she was convinced, the most tiring and trying time of the whole year.' She pooh-poohed all attempts to make her neglect any of her usual duties, and attended to both her outdoor and indoor tasks with unabated diligence ; but the zeal, the pleasure in them was gone. Then her father proposed that they should go away on one of their usual tours—she and he and John—but Nita thought she would prefer to wait until later in the year: Wellfield was so beautiful now. When they did go away, she wished, she said, to go to the Italian lakes, and in a month later it would be time enough for that. Her word at home was a mandate, and her injunction was obeyed, though John, in his slow and deliberate manner, did remind her that there was a little touch of inconsistency between her two statements : first, that the Abbey lay so low,

and that this was the most tiring and trying time of the whole year; and, second, that Wellfield was nicer now than at any other season. To which she answered, a little wearily, 'How you quibble about things! I don't want to go away from home. I hate changes.'

Nita had always led a remarkably quiet life. Her friends in or about Wellfield were very few; she had not a single intimate girl-friend. Her father, and still more her cousin, John Leyburn, had always been her greatest confidants. All things that a sister may say to and confide in a brother whom she esteems and loves, and in whom she has the most boundless trust and confidence, Nita had always been in the habit of saying to and confiding in John Leyburn. His image was inseparable from her scheme of life. She never saw him without a feeling of contented pleasure—much the same feeling as that she experienced when Speedwell, with a great sigh, came up to her, laid his great nose on

her lap, and looked with his honest brown eyes intently into her face. The idea of life without John in it had never occurred to her. She was usually on excellent terms with her father's cousin, Miss Shuttleworth, knowing her sterling worth; but her nature had not much real sympathy with the sternly disciplinarian one of Aunt Margaret. Their terms were neutral. The gaieties at Wellfield might be said to be—none. The Boltons visited with none of the old families residing near the place; they were looked upon, and they knew it, somewhat in the light of interlopers, which fact had not troubled them much.

It sounds, in description, a dull life; but Nita had never found it so, hers being essentially one of those natures to which 'peace at home' is the one thing needful. She did not care to seek distractions outside, and no amount of distractions could have filled up the ache which would have been there if she had felt that at home, in the back-ground,

there was a jar, a quarrel, a dissension of any kind. Indeed, I am not sure that there may not be duller things for a girl than to live in a beautiful home which she loves, with human interests around her, not many, but deep, with a good father, a good friend, and a good dog as her chief and almost her only associates. Such a life Nita Bolton had led now for seven years—a silent, still, uneventful life, but one which she had always found sufficient, nay, delightful. Vague yearnings after lovers, and devotion, and romance, had been singularly absent from her thoughts. She had literally wandered

'In maiden meditation, fancy free.'

Sometimes, after reading some very noble or beautiful poem, some very striking and powerful novel, she had, it is true, wondered a little if life was ever to contain any romance for her, and had thought that such a romance would be pleasant. Then, being well endowed with a certain shrewd, homely,

common sense, she had often observed her own reflection in the looking-glass, and had said to herself, 'Nita, my child, don't flatter yourself that any man will ever fall in love with you for your beauty; and if he should tell you he does, don't believe him. He might like you for some of your other qualities, if he ever took the trouble to find them out, and no doubt many persons might be found to love your money, and take you with it as a necessary appendage; but I think you would do best to keep heart-whole, and not marry anyone at all."

She had been very contented in this prospect, though it must be owned she had never contemplated the future without placing in it the figure of John Leyburn in the character of 'guide, philosopher, and friend.' Then her father had appeared one afternoon, with Jerome Wellfield at his side, and from that hour Nita's fixed and settled plans for life were upset.

That she should have cast aside her crude,

untried schemes and fancies when the man appeared whom she loved, in spite of all efforts not to love him, was perhaps not surprising; indeed, there was perhaps nothing very surprising in the whole matter. But, in every deep, intense, and powerful love there are tragic elements, and those elements were present in this love of Nita's. Not the least tragic one was, that though, as time went on, Wellfield said many tender things to her, and looked unutterable ones; though she loved him as her life, and would have hailed as a foretaste of heaven the conviction that he loved her, yet she never had that conviction. She did not feel that he loved her; she only felt that the things which she had seen she now could see no more, that her peace and repose of mind were gone, and that thus it must be, until he or she were no more. She felt that she was living in an unnatural manner—in a dream; that the equilibrium between outward and inward things had received a shock. She

knew, though she would not have put it in those words, that, sooner or later, that equilibrium must be readjusted—that something would come to restore it, that the restoration might take many shapes. There was the equilibrium which means happiness, the continuous adjustment of outer to inner conditions; there was the imperfect adjustment of those conditions, which meant more or less of sorrow and suffering; there is the final equilibrium—that great adjustment of outward conditions to inward ones, which we call death. Any of these things might come to her she vaguely felt as she paced beside the river walk, with Speedwell beside her, and saw the swirling eddies of the river, and heard its gurgle, and saw the dull, hazy, sultry blue of the sky above her, and felt the warmth of perfect summer in every vein.

Turning and raising her eyes, she saw Wellfield coming from the great gateway towards her. He was on his way from Burn-

ham, where he had been trying to learn how to become a business man in her father's office.

'Good-afternoon, Miss Bolton. I have brought you good news.'

'Have you? What kind of news?'

'The news that I am at last going to relieve you of my presence here, which you must have thought lately was to become a permanent infliction. I have just been down to Monk's Gate. The men wish to persuade me that it is not nearly what it ought to be, but I told them it would do very well for me, and that I should have no money to pay them with if they did anything else. I showed them exactly what I would have done. They are to finish to-night, by working an hour overtime, and I shall go there to-morrow.'

He had taken his place by her side, as if he were accustomed to walk there; had deprived her of the book, which she had shut up, and of the sunshade that she had been

carrying, and now he looked down at her and waited for her to speak.

'It—you—I think you have rather hurried them. Is it not rather a sudden resolve?'

'Sudden action, perhaps. But for more than a week I have been chafing at the delay, and at the way in which I have been obliged to quarter myself upon you here—a proceeding for which I have not the least justification.'

'Except that of having been often invited to remain as long as you liked, or felt it convenient,' said Nita, in a low voice.

'I know you and Mr. Bolton have been kindness itself, and I can never be grateful enough to you.'

'I don't see why, I am sure. Who has so good a right as you to be here?'

He laughed. 'If I were obliged to bring a lawsuit for the restitution of my property, I should like you to be the defendant,' he said. 'I should win in a canter.'

Nita was silent.

'At least, I shall not be far away from the Abbey,' he went on, 'and I am glad of it. You will let me come up and see you, I hope, sometimes, though I don't hope for such privileges as Leyburn enjoys.'

'John is like one of ourselves,' said Nita, originally.

'And I am not. I know that, and am constantly reminded of it.'

'Shall you send for your sister now?' asked Nita.

'Not at once. I must wait till things are a little more certain. I am getting on in my lessons at Burnham. I know how to do book-keeping now, and your father has so much foreign correspondence that he says I shall be of use to him.'

'Do not speak in that way!' exclaimed Nita; 'you know I hate it.'

'I only do it in the hope of making you see how reasonable it all is, and how absurd it would be in me to expect any-

thing else, and how lucky I may feel myself.'

'And how unlucky you feel yourself in reality,' she replied. 'Don't try to deceive me by talking in that way. Well, I hope you will like Monk's Gate, and that you will be—happy there.'

'And I may come here sometimes?'

'Of course,'

'I shall invite you and Miss Shuttleworth to come and have tea with me. I know Miss Shuttleworth honours that repast more than any other.'

Nita laughed a little dry laugh.

'We will be sure to come,' she said, 'and we shall expect toast and teacakes, and then bread and butter. I hope you will see that the tea is strong enough, and that your servant puts a clean cloth on the table. I hope you like housekeeping on that scale.'

She spoke rather savagely, as if she took a delight in saying something almost insulting to him.

'What do you mean?' he asked.

'Only that I wonder you can talk in such a manner. I wonder you can submit to such an arrangement. It is monstrous!' she answered, indignantly.

It was Wellfield's turn to laugh.

'You are hopeless — so unpractical—so heroic in your ideas!' he said. 'And there is your father coming. Pray don't favour him with such remarks as you have just made to me, or he may say that if I am too good for my place I can leave it, and then I wonder where I should be.'

Nita was silent, her breast heaving. Mr. Bolton came up, and Jerome repeated his news to him too. He received it with a calmness which his daughter thought barbarous. They all three went into the house. That evening 'as it is the last,' both Nita and Jerome said, he sang for them again. John was not there, nor Miss Shuttleworth. The visits of both had become less frequent. Jerome was not sorry, and Nita, carried on-

wards by her changed state of mind, was hardly conscious of it.

* * * * *

She sat quite alone in the drawing-room, on the following evening. It was Friday—a busy day with her father, who was in Manchester, attending a meeting, and who would not return till the last train at night. She had heard John promise to go to Monk's Gate and sit an hour with Wellfield—'by way of a housewarming,' the latter had said, with a sarcastic little laugh. Miss Shuttleworth had a class of village girls on this particular evening. Nita therefore found herself in the strange and unwonted position of being absolutely alone.

The stillness of the house grew oppressive to her, as the hours passed by. It grew dark, and she sat alone. The day had been chilly and dull, for the weather had suddenly changed, and the sun had not once during the whole day shone out. Speedwell couched at her feet, and the lamp was lighted and the

shutters closed, to shut out the dark trees and the shadowy garden.

As she sat thus alone, feeling her heart very desolate, the door was opened, and John Leyburn came in.

'John, you!' she exclaimed, springing up and running to meet him—'I thought you were going to Monk's Gate.'

'So I am: on my way there now. But you didn't think I should go without looking in upon you—and your father away. You look remarkably desolate.'

'Do I? Everyone has gone, and it is dull.'

'If I had thought of it, I wouldn't have gone to see Wellfield to-night. I would have come and sat with you, my dear. Are you cold, Nita? What's the matter? Where's your little red shawl? and why don't you have a fire?'

'I think it is rather chilly this evening,' said Nita, letting him fold the little shawl round her shoulders. 'Autumn will soon be

here; and then a day in Lancashire without sun is always cold, no matter what the time of the year may be.'

'So it seems,' replied John, who had gone on his knees before the grate, and removing a bowl filled with peacock's feathers, disclosed what is known, in Lancashire at any rate, as 'a cold fire,' laid ready in the grate.

'Where are the matches?' he asked, finding them. He struck one, watched the flame, and then came and sat down beside Nita.

'I will stay till it has burned up,' said he. 'Nothing is more cheerful than a good fire, and nothing more dismal than one just struggling into existence.'

'How kind you are, John,' said Nita, looking up at him gratefully.

'Pooh! Who would be otherwise to such a desolate-looking little person as you are? I suppose your father will come by the ten o'clock train?'

'I expect so. Oh, how nice that blaze is!

I shall be quite happy now, with this novel. It is one of those which you brought me from London.'

'Which I understood you were not going to read.'

'Oh, but I am. I am very much interested in it; and—don't you think Mr. Wellfield will be expecting you? *He* will be lonely in his new house.'

'It will do him no harm if he is. But I see you want me to be off. Now, look here, Nita, don't fret; there's nothing in this life worth fretting about.'

'People fret because they can't help it, not because things are worth it or not worth it,' said Nita, wearily. 'Good-night! Thank you for coming to cheer me up.'

'Good-night,' said John, kindly and gravely; and he stooped and touched her forehead with his lips. Nita smiled faintly.

'That is only for Christmas Days and birthdays,' said she. 'Three a year, John; so the next one is forfeited.'

'How do I know where we may both be when the next one falls due?' he replied, with a look in his eyes and a line upon his brow which she did not quite understand. 'Well good-night!'

CHAPTER X.

INDIAN SUMMER.

JEROME was not without visitors when he was fairly established at Monk's Gate. John Leyburn frequently found his way down there, and so did Father Somerville, and in him Wellfield found his most congenial companion. They formed a strange trio, for the three were often there together.

There was that year a short, gorgeous Indian summer, at the end of September and the beginning of October. It was as warm as August; the foliage a mass of beauty—a dying, sunset glow, ready to be

whirled away in showers at the first swirl of the equinoctial gales which would assuredly succeed this calm. But in the meantime, while it lasted, it was beautiful. They sat with open windows at Monk's Gate, and with the door set open too; and while the lamp burnt on the centre table, John Leyburn stretched out his long limbs on the old settee, and smoked his pipe; while Somerville, in the easy-chair at the other side of the window, twisted cigarettes with his long, slender fingers; and Jerome, at the piano, would play, or sing, or improvise, for hours. Many a one of the village people, many a 'lover and his lass,' would pause to lean upon the top of the gate and hearken to the broken, fitful gusts of sound which came wafted to them from the open window and door. Strange, weird harmonies of Liszt, and Chopin, and Schumann, smote their astonished ears, and songs still stranger and more eerie than the tunes—deep, mournful German melodies, or some wild, homely,

Volkslied would float out and strike them with wonder, such music being assuredly for the first time heard in Wellfield.

Once or twice on these evenings, sometimes alone, and sometimes with John (when he was not at Monk's Gate), always with her big dog by her side, a girl's figure had passed the gate as the music was going on. Once it had been a passionate love-song that was borne to her ears, and once again the overpowering sweetness of a movement of the so-called 'Moonlight' sonata. She had turned her face towards the place whence the sounds came, but neither hurried nor stayed her sauntering walk, and, returning the greetings of those who loitered and listened, had passed on. Those evenings of music were the only pleasant part of Jerome's existence at that time. Then he forgot for a moment Nita's pale face and Sara's letters; then the old student days seemed to have returned again—the old days of music, of midsummer madness, of 'carelesse contente.'

Letters came to him there, of course, from Sara and from his sister, letters telling him of their every-day life, and of the incidents of it. With each of these letters his mental debate was opened up afresh, until he began to dread them, for he knew that they were noble. He knew that the atmosphere in which Sara lived—of waiting, of patience, of hope, and of steadfast love, was a reproach to his own wretched vacillations of mind. Her calmness and strength oppressed him, overawed him. It was no longer a question with him as to whether he should tell Nita Bolton that he loved another woman; the question was now, how to approach with Sara the subject of his desiring to be free. He did not in the least know how the position had come about, but it was there. Unable to make up his mind to *do* anything, he contented himself with answering Sara's letters in a strain far more ardent than that in which she wrote to him, protesting the entire devotion for her which he felt, as he wrote.

It was, perhaps, Jerome Wellfield's misfortune that these two women loved him so much and so deeply that they let him see too easily how dear he was to them. It is possible that a featherweight might have turned the scale. Had Sara Ford not confessed her love with such an utter frankness and self-abnegation—had he entertained any doubt as to his success with her, surely he must have been more circumspect. Dire necessity, and the fear of losing the prize, must have kept him honest. And had Nita Bolton's love been differently shown—in a less subtile, coarser, opener way—most assuredly the charm there of wealth and restored fortunes must have been powerless. But he knew that Sara Ford worshipped him heart and soul, that he was the light of her eyes and the joy of her life. And he knew that Nita Bolton loved him with the love that is patient, and enduring, and tenacious; that his joy was her joy, and his sorrow her sorrow; that for him or for his advantage

she would efface herself, and rejoice that she was permitted to do so. And with affairs in this state the Indian summer came to an end.

STAGE III.

CHAPTER I.

INTERMEDIATE.

THE Professor's grand, rugged face and delicate, artist brow were somewhat clouded. He rose from the chair before the easel, on which he had been sitting, and laid his brush down.

'You have not done much since I was last here,' he remarked.

'No, I'm afraid not,' replied Sara Ford, who had been standing near him watching him as he touched her picture here and

there. The scene was her atelier. The time was a broiling afternoon in September; but here, in this sunless room, facing north, it was cooler than elsewhere. She was dressed in a long, plain gown of some creamy white stuff. Her face was pale, and her eyes somewhat heavy and languid. The masses of wavy, chestnut hair lay somewhat heavily and droopingly over the white temples and broad brow. The only spot of decided colour about her was the glossy dark-green leaves of a *Gloire de Dijon* rose which was stuck in the breast of her dress—a species of rose which Professor Wilhelmi, with his keen and observant artist's eye, had remarked his favourite pupil had lately become very fond of wearing. He had noticed, too, that during the past few weeks she had become, if possible, more beautiful than ever, with a sudden glow and blaze of beauty which was none the less brilliant in that it was accompanied by a silence and quietness greater than of yore. Wilhelmi was an artist

to his very soul. Creed, nationality, and rank counted as nothing, and less than nothing, with him. Genius was his care and his watchword. Two years ago he had, he believed, found that Sara Ford had received a spark of the divine fire, and from that moment she had been as his own child to him—his soul's child, the child of his highest and purest individuality. And as time went on he had thought also to discover in her the industry which some have said *is* genius. All had gone triumphantly until at the end of last July she had returned from her visit to Nassau, and he, coming to her to resume his lessons, had found that something had taken flight—something else had appeared in its place. The exchange was the more annoying in that he could not name either the one thing or the other. As she spoke to him now, he glanced down at her large white hand, which had been resting on the easel as he and she spoke. Had that ring of sapphires which had replaced the old dia-

mond rose that she used to wear anything to do with the change in her ?

'How you have changed my inanimate little daub, Herr Professor!' she said. 'It was without life. All that I do now seems without life. Sometimes I think I had better put away my paint and my brushes, and lock up my atelier for the next six months, and not look at a canvas for that length of time.'

'Do so, if you can,' he replied; 'but if you do I shall know that your nature has changed.'

She was silent, still looking down upon the sketch. Wilhelmi, who looked grave and concerned, did not speak for a short time. At last he said :

'Do you know that poor Goldmark died this morning ?'

'Did he!' exclaimed Sara, a rapid flash of sorrow and sympathy passing over her face. 'How very sad! Such a talent and such a career cut off in that manner.'

'Ay, sad enough. But there are sadder

things than for a career to be cut off by death. There is the palsy of self-satisfaction, which has virtually killed the very finest talent over and over again, while leaving the body as strong and flourishing as ever. Poor Goldmark was rather too much the other way. Nothing that he did ever satisfied him.'

'Then do you not think he had genius?' asked Sara.

'N——no—I cannot call his gift genius. It just fell short of the happy inspired audacity of genius. It was talent of the very highest order.'

'That was always my idea of him. Won't his wife and children be rather badly off?'

'I am afraid they will. But Frau Goldmark is rather a stirring little woman. Something will be contrived for them, I doubt not.'

'Are you going? This has been a short lesson.'

'It has,' he answered with the same ambiguous little fold in his forehead. 'You have not supplied me with much material to

teach upon this time. You must work, my dear child—work while it is to-day,' he added earnestly. 'Bear my words in mind. Work while it is to-day, and let nothing interfere, or you will have to repent your idleness in dust and ashes.'

With which, not waiting for any reply, he left her.

Sara looked after him dreamily. 'What does he mean?' she speculated. 'But I know. He finds a change in me; and I am changed, even to myself. Sometimes I think the old spirit has completely left me, and yet how can that be? It will all come right again, I suppose. But I wish—I wish it might be soon.'

She sighed as she put down her palette, and sat down before her easel in the chair which Wilhelmi had lately occupied, and, amid the profound stillness of the quiet afternoon, let her thoughts wander off there where now they were for ever straying. She was too much under the influence of her love

for Wellfield to be able to reflect whether that influence were a good or a bad one. That said, all is said ; it contains her mental history for the past two months, and accounts for the depression which stole over Wilhelmi's face and into his keen eyes as he saw her ; it accounts too for the nameless paralysis which had stolen the cunning from her right hand, and from her soul the ardent zeal for her art. She was Sara Ford still, but Sara Ford metamorphosed. Wilhelmi sorrowfully told himself one day that there was now more life and spirit in the water-colour sketches which *die Kleine*, as he called Avice Wellfield, made, than in those of his dearest pupil, of which but lately he had been so proud.

'I am certain it's some wretched love affair!' he muttered, as he strode abstractedly away from the Jägerstrasse towards his own house. 'Good heavens! to think of *that* woman's talent being palsied by some wretched sentimental *Schwärmerei*; it is horrible. Why is not genius created senseless, sexless, senti-

mentless? But then, of course, it could never appeal to sense, and sex, and sentiment, as it must if it is to be an influence. It is a thousand pities, it is lamentable. And Falkenberg wrote of her in what might for him be called enthusiastic strains. I wish there were some way of saving her. I wish the man would play false, or that some shock would rouse her from this apathy!'

It may here be casually observed that Professor Wilhelmi cherished a conviction that he understood woman, and could account for and cure all her vagaries, had he but the power placed in his hands. It was a delusion broken every day by the conduct of his own wife and daughter, to whom, in all matters outside his art, he was a slave, but he lived in it still, and would live in it till he died.

Meantime the Indian summer dawned, and flamed itself out here too, as well as at Wellfield. September went out, and October was ushered in with unusual mildness and glory. It was a sight to gladden the eyes of

an artist, even the low flat country which at Elberthal stretches for unbroken miles on either side the broad Rhine. For there were glorious sunsets, colouring river, and field, and town, with strange glorified lights, and at that sunset-time in the Hofgarten, the yellow golden beams shone in a glowing, dazzling mist through the autumn trees, and flooded every twig, every stick and stone, with mellow radiance. At that time the stalls of the old women at the street corners were piled high with grapes, and plums, and russet pears, which fruits were to be purchased for almost nothing. At that time it was good to sail down the river to Kaiserswerth, or up the stream to Neuss, and to return at sunset, and watch the pomp of it glorifying the majestic river. There was no striking beauty of crag or waterfall, of castled Drachenfels or magic Loreley, but there were the great plains stretching Hollandwards, dressed in their autumn garments; the broad expanse of water sweeping by, strong and

untroubled ; the busy humming town behind, with its throb of varied life, its many interests, its treasures of art and joy, its music and melody, inseparable from all true German life.

The two girls lived on, happy and contented. To them came no word of what was going on at Wellfield. They knew nothing of the long parley which their best-beloved was even then standing to hold with baseness and dishonesty, while honour and honesty stood by. Had they known, they too could have told him what perhaps his own conscience had more than once whispered to him : that honour and honesty will not continue such a parley for ever. They will not always remain there, holding out their neglected hands for us to clasp. There comes a time when they will wait no longer, but will withdraw their hands, fold their mantles around them, turn away, and leave us to consort with the company ourselves have chosen.

CHAPTER II.

LEBENDE BILDER.

TEN days later, Sara, sitting one morning in her atelier, heard a knock at her door, and answered abstractedly '*Herein!*'

Looking up to see who might be her visitor, she saw a little lady in widow's weeds.

'Frau Goldmark!' she exclaimed, rising in astonishment. Frau Goldmark was the widow of that young artist of promise, of whose sudden death Wilhelmi had informed her. Sara had heard constant talk of her for the last few days, to which talk she had listened in a vague, unheeding way. Her acquain-

tance with her was very slight, and had never before gone so far as an exchange of visits, and she was proportionately surprised to see her now, and under the existing circumstances, in her atelier.

'Yes, *liebe* Miss Ford, it is I. And you may well look astonished, but do only hear me.'

'Come into my sitting-room, then, Frau Goldmark, and tell me what I can do for you,' said Sara, leading the way to where Avice was seated with a book in the parlour.

Frau Goldmark was a slight, pretty, little woman, with round, important, excited-looking eyes, and a general aspect which did not altogether charm Miss Ford, who formed indeed, in appearance, and manner, and everything else, a startling contrast to her visitor. Sara had heard vague rumours which gave Frau Goldmark the name of a gossip, and she had never felt any violent desire to make her acquaintance; but her recent heavy loss, her widowhood, and the

inevitable hard struggle which lay before her, all combined to make Sara lay aside all considerations save those of kindness. She offered Frau Goldmark a seat, and waited to hear on what errand she had come.

'I have come to ask a favour, *mein Fräulein*, an immense one; *ein unerhörtes*,' she began.

'Indeed! I wonder how I can serve you?' asked Sara, in her most gracious manner.

Frau Goldmark looked at her keenly, despite her excitement, and found time for the reflection, 'She certainly is as beautiful as all these men say, and if I can only get her to do it—I will ask for both the scenes while I am about it.'

'You are aware, dear Miss Ford, of the most lamented death of my dear good husband,' said Frau Goldmark, with brimming eyes and a trembling lip.

'Yes, indeed! I was most truly grieved to hear of it. We must all lament it—you that you have lost a good husband, and we

artists that a brother of such promise is lost to us.'

'You speak most beautifully, Fräulein. It has been a sore blow to us. I and my babes are left almost penniless. I shall have to work now to find bread for them, and thanks to the goodness of my friends, I believe it will be made easy for me.'

'What *can* she want?' Sara was beginning to think, when Frau Goldmark again took up her parable with great animation, saying:

'The artists, my husband's friends, have not forsaken me in my distress. Herr Professor Wilhelmi has behaved to me like a father.'

'He is goodness and generosity itself, I know,' replied Sara, her full contralto tones in strong contrast with the high-pitched notes of Frau Goldmark's voice. She had that great defect, common to so very many of her countrywomen, a high, harsh, shrill voice.

'He asked me what he could do for me,

and I related my plan to him, which he approved of. I said that if I had but a little capital I could earn a living for myself and my children. I would open a photographic atelier. My father was a photographer, and I am perfectly acquainted with everything belonging to the art.' Sara suppressed a smile — this from an artist's wife. 'A very little practice, and I should succeed admirably. The money to start with remained the only difficulty.'

'I see,' said Sara, wondering more than ever what she could be supposed to have to do with it.'

'Perhaps you have heard, Fräulein, that Professor Wilhelmi, and some other gentlemen and ladies, have decided, out of their respect and love for my husband's memory, to give an entertainment on my behalf of *tableaux vivants*, for which you know they are so celebrated here. They are to be given in the *Malkasten* Club, or, if that is not large enough, in the *Rittersaal* of the Tonhalle.

They think by this means that they can realise the sum necessary. Oh, Fräulein Ford, I *beg* you to consent!'

'Consent—to what, my dear Frau Goldmark?' she asked, in bewilderment.

'If you will take a part in the two principal pictures, the success is assured of the whole entertainment,' was her breathless reply, while Frau Goldmark half rose from her chair and held out her hands towards Sara, *flehend*, as she herself would have said, in a theatrical manner.

'I—oh, I am afraid it is impossible!' said Sara, hastily.

'Ah, do not say so, Miss Ford! Think what it means to me. There is no one else here who can do it as you would do it. The Herr Professor quite agreed with me He gave me this note to bring to you.'

Saying which, she suddenly pulled a little note from the bosom of her dress, and gave it to Sara, who, astonished at the whole affair, read, in Wilhelmi's hand:

'Do, if you possibly can, give your consent to Frau Goldmark's request, it is for a good cause; and, if my approval is anything to you, you have it to the full.

'WILHELMI.'

Here Avice, who had been listening intently, and who had just realised what it was all about, chimed in:

'Oh, do, Sara!—do!'

'Thank you, *mein Fräulein*, for taking my side,' exclaimed Frau Goldmark, quickly.

'What are the pictures you wish me to take part in?' asked Sara. 'Have you decided upon them?'

'*Natürlich, mein Fräulein.* They are the two principal ones—a scene from Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht*, after the celebrated picture in the public gallery, with you for Thusnelda, and Herr Max Helmuth, Fräulein Wilhelmi's *Bräutigam*, as Hermann; and the last picture of my blessed *Mann;*

his *Ja, oder Nein*, which is still hanging unsold in the Exhibition.'

Sara was silent, pondering. She knew both the pictures. Frau Goldmark proceeded:

'Professor Wilhelmi bade me come to you myself, for he said you would do that for the poor and afflicted which you would not for the prosperous and happy.'

'Are you sure that everyone wishes it?' asked Miss Ford?'

'As certain as I am that I am here,' was the emphatic reply, '*Denken sie nur, Fräulein!* When the scheme was first proposed Amalia Waldschmidt vowed she would have the part of the lady in my husband's picture—she, the stupid, heavy—but pardon! I ought to be grateful to all; only the Herr Professor quite agreed with me that she was the last person to take such a part. She has no *Geist*, no *Gefühl*. How can she give to the picture the expression it requires? But she made a point of taking that part; they say,

because she is so anxious to act with Ludwig Maas, who takes the part of the bold but poor lover.' Seeing a strong expression of distaste and disapproval upon Miss Ford's face, Frau Goldmark went on quickly :

'And you know, *liebstes Fräulein*, her father is a man whom we dare not offend, and *die* Amalia rules him with a rod of iron.'

Sara bowed assent to this proposition. It was evident that to the excited little widow this great entertainment formed the representative event of the modern world.

'Imagine!' she went on, 'Amalia is suddenly taken ill with *scharlach-fieber*—scarlet fever you call it. Yes, it is so; and it is providential. Naturally she cannot act the part, nor even appear at the *lebende Bilder*, for which *Gott sei dank!* though I know it is very wrong of me to say so. And I hope she will have the fever mildly and make a speedy recovery; but ah, I am glad she comes not; and I do *pray* of you, dear Miss

Ford, to take the part, and also that of Thusnelda. I shall bless you all my life if you only will.'

'I will take the parts, Frau Goldmark, and will do my best to act them well,' said Sara, composedly, anxious to put an end to the widow's exaggerated prayers and protestations. Her consent was received with a perfect whirlwind of thanks and blessings and expressions of joy, which she cut short by saying:

'But I beg you will not say anything comparing me with Fräulein Waldschmidt. It would be very wrong, and if I heard of such a thing I should instantly give it up.'

'You may trust me indeed, *mein liebes Fräulein!* And now I go to the Herrn Professor, to tell him of my success. He will let you know all about the rest.'

With the most affectionate adieux she departed. Sara and Avice, left alone, both burst into a fit of laughter.

'What an absurd little woman!' exclaimed Avice.

'Painfully so,' responded Sara. 'I own that I wonder to see her going about doing this kind of thing herself. If it were not that the dear old Professor evidently desires it so much'—she tossed Wilhelmi's note to Avice—'I should refuse.'

'They are both very different subjects—the pictures, I mean,' said Avice, musingly. 'You will look splendid as Thusnelda, Sara.'

'Shall I? It is a splendid picture, certainly.'

It was a picture representing that scene in Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht*, in which Hermann, seated beside Thusnelda, listens to her, while she indignantly relates how the Roman envoy, Ventidius, had impertinently, and without her knowledge, clipped off a lock of her hair, upon hearing which Hermann, with a grim and granite humour, and a mirth bordering on the diabolical, describes to her how that lock will probably go to

Rome, there to excite the cupidity of the Roman women, who, he informs her, admire hair like that—'*gold' und schön, und trocken' so wie dein*,'—and sometimes have it—not growing on their own heads, but shorn from those of other women, and that the golden locks of a Teuton princess would be an ornament which they, any of them, would especially glory in wearing. It was a noble picture, by a celebrated artist, and Sara, already even, felt some thrills of pleasure in the idea of taking a part in the representation of it. The other picture was a rather ambitious *tableau de genre*, Goldmark's last, and was called *Ja, oder Nein.*

The next time that Wilhelmi saw Sara, she told him what she had done, and added:

'I hope I have been right, but it seems to me that there are many girls in Elberthal who ought to have had the parts offered to them—your townspeople,' she added, smiling.

Wilhelmi laughed as he asked, 'Do you seriously mean to say you think there is

any one young woman in Elberthal except yourself who would in the least *look* the part of Thusnelda?'

Sara laughed, but was obliged to confess that she did not.

She wrote to Jerome, telling him what she was going to do; adding, 'I hope you don't mind. My Hermann will only be Max Helmuth; he will look the part every inch, I must say, but he is quite harmless; he is engaged to Wilhelmi's daughter, and wildly in love with her; so say you don't mind, because they have set their hearts upon it.'

Jerome replied that she must certainly take the part. 'I suppose your Hermann is a contrast to me. One can only think of that enlightened barbarian as some fair-haired giant, with a fierce yellow moustache. You will make an ideal Thusnelda, I must say, according to Heinrich Kleist's version, at any rate.'

Relieved in her mind at having Jerome's consent, and Wilhelmi's approval, Sara gave

herself up with genuine artist's delight to rehearsing and preparing her parts ; that of Thusnelda in especial, giving her real joy and pleasure. The festival itself was fixed for the middle of October.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECOND MEETING.

IT had at first been intended to give the *tableaux vivants*, or as they call them in Germany, *lebende Bilder*, in the small hall of the pretty little *Malkasten*, or artists' club; but so numerous had been the applications for places, that it was decided instead to have them in a larger room belonging to the building where all the concerts were held—the public *Tonhalle*. This proved quite successful, and every seat was taken a week beforehand.

It was a very pretty sight: all Elberthal was there; assembled, too, in good time, and

everyone talking, laughing, moving about with a freedom, an ease, and an absence of ceremony peculiar to German entertainments of the kind.

Sara Ford and Avice went with the Wilhelmis, who, being important persons in the affair, had naturally secured a number of the uppermost seats. Sara's parts were in the second and fourth pictures. She accordingly had to go and dress for her part of Thusnelda while the first picture was being given. She left Avice, seated between Luise Wilhelmi and her mother, and therefore safely chaperoned. Luise was in a state of wild excitement, which indeed was her chronic condition. She was a very sprightly, pretty brunette, fond of brilliant colours, and given to attiring herself in a somewhat stagey manner. On this occasion she was strikingly but becomingly dressed in hues of amber and pomegranate, with many slits and slashes, tags and ends and furbelows. Nothing would induce her to yield to her father's requests

that she would dress with a noble and classic simplicity, or to her lover's representations that white muslin and blue ribbon and a generally inexpensive shepherdess style of thing would become her wonderfully well. Fräulein Luise loved silk and satin, rich fabrics and bright jewels, and so long as anyone could be found to provide her with them, she would wear them. Avice Wellfield, beside her, looked like an inhabitant of another world. It was the first time she had been out anywhere since her father's death; and her plain black frock and white *crêpe* ruffles at neck and wrists formed a pointed contrast to Luise's flashing colours and glittering rings and chains and bangles. Avice had plaited her hair up into a coronet, which gave her an older, staider look. The girl was fulfilling, more and more every day, Sara's prophecy to her brother, that she would one day be beautiful. Her new life, happier despite its poverty than the old one, had called forth that beauty, while the intel-

lect, which had formerly been repressed and was now in every way encouraged to develop itself, gave dignity and depth to the mere outward loveliness of hue and feature and moulding. She sat quite still, watching with enchantment what was to her an entirely new scene. It was her first entertainment of the kind; and she enjoyed it with a zest only known in such long-deferred pleasures. Luise was jumping up and sitting down twenty times in five minutes, teasing her father to know how Max would 'do,' and if he was nervous—if it would be better for her not to look at him too hard, at which Avice suppressed a smile, and Wilhelmi, with his rollicking Jovine laugh, cried:

'Look at him as hard as you can stare, little simpleton. Do you think he will turn his head to look at you? It would ruin the whole artistic effect of the picture, and to-night it is Art who will be paramount before even you.'

At which she pouted, and the orchestra

suddenly struck up most eloquent music; delicious to hear, and unseen singers accompanied them. It was a portion of Liszt's *Entfesselter Prometheus* that they played and sang, a chorus of grape-gatherers, and the melody was exquisitely sweet, and was dying gently away as the curtain rose upon a magic scene—a 'midday rest in the grape-harvest.' The picture thus copied was a celebrated one. A background of vine-covered, autumn-tinted Italian hills, and in the foreground a richly picturesque group of men and maidens, women and children, in every attitude of beauty and grace that could be imagined. In the very centre stood a splendidly handsome woman, dark, tall, and amply formed, in an Italian peasant's dress; her arms were thrown upwards as she shook a tambourine and looked behind her to a youth who raised a spray of deeply tinted vine-leaves to bind them in her abundant strong black hair. The others were variously occupied; some in watching this principal couple

and in jesting aside about them. One child was industriously devouring grapes ; two ads were half wrestling with one another ; a couple of girls were whispering with their lovers. The music still played soft strains, and the *Chor der Winzner* died into silence, while every figure stood out with a mellow distinctness, breathing and living, yet still—still and motionless, as the painted figures on the canvas themselves.

Twice the beautiful picture was shown, amidst applause and delight. Then ensued the first interval, during which comments were freely exchanged, and much laughter and gossip about the various performers went on.

'It must be fearfully difficult,' remarked Avice, in an almost awestruck tone. 'How could she go on holding the tambourine for so long without its making even one tiny tinkle ?'

'Wait till the next,' said Wilhelmi, who appeared to have pinned his hopes on the

Hermannsschlacht picture. 'Luise, pray that thy Max may not lose his heart to the Princess of Germania.'

Luise laughed a heart-whole laugh. The frantic devotion of her huge lover to his tyrannical little bride was too well-known for her to feel any qualms of jealousy.

Just then the band began to play a solemn battle march, through which might be heard, like an undercurrent, the clashing of martial instruments, and the angry mutter of war. Then slowly the curtain rose. Expectation grew so intense, that even applause was hushed, and only a murmur went through the assembly, when at last the picture was fully displayed before them. The picture which was copied gave the very spirit of the poet's dream, as he pictured that ancient chieftain and his princess, and the living picture was an idealisation of the painted one.

They appeared to be seated beneath a mighty spreading oak—a primeval monarch of the forest. The trunk of the tree was at

the extreme left. Above, its foliage overhead spread over almost the entire scene. Stretching away to the right from Hermann and Thusnelda, appeared a soft, grassy sward, fallen leaves, and forest flowers. In the background, almost in the centre, burnt a steady, reddish light, while to the right a high-flaming cresset cast fitful gleams upon the centre-point of interest — Hermann, Prince of the Cherusker, and Thusnelda, his wife.

The warrior, in the armour and dress of his tribe, was reclined upon the ground, half raised on one elbow; his short coat of mail, and small-pointed helmet, with the crest a-top, his long yellow hair and moustache, wild and fearless blue eyes; the massive and almost savage grace and power of the whole figure were splendid. A half-smile, at once grim and bitter, curved his lips as he looked up into Thusnelda's face, and with one great hand lifts up a heavy lock of the waving, golden-brown hair which sweeps

over her shoulders, and touches the ground, confined above by a gorgeous diadem of gold and precious stones, the one which she has previously told him 'thou brought'st me of late from Rome;' the diadem which Ventidius had arranged for her, with what intent has she not just heard from Hermann?

Sara Ford, as Thusnelda, is also seated upon the ground at the foot of the tree, clad in a loose, flowing white dress of some fine soft web. Leaning a little over towards the warrior, she rests her weight upon her left hand, and appears to question him with amazement and indignation. The music stopped, and behind the scenes some one read a portion of that magnificent scene—a scene such as perhaps no one but Heinrich von Kleist could have written quite in that way.

The unseen readers recited, or read, with dramatic effect.

THUSNELDA.

I think thou dream'st, thou rav'st.
Who is't will shear *my* head?

HERMANN.

Who? Pooh! Quintilius Varus and the Romans,
With whom I just have sealed a firm alliance.

THUSNELDA.

The Romans! How?

HERMANN.

Yea, what the devil think'st thou?
And yet the Roman ladies really must,
When they adorn themselves, have decent hair.

THUSNELDA.

Have then the Roman women none at all?

HERMANN.

None, I say, save what's black—all black and stiff, like witches;
Not fair, and dry, and golden, like this of thine.

The voices ceased, and at this point the applause burst out in a storm. Avice passed her hand over her eyes, starting violently at being thus dragged back to the everyday world. So life-like had been the scene, one seemed to be transported to those strange, far-back primitive days—the days before that dim and distant *Hermannsschlacht*, about

which historiographers are even yet not agreed. But far more wonderful to Avice was the way in which her friend had, as it were, transformed herself from the collected, well-bred, sophisticated young lady of to-day, into an ancient Teuton chieftainess, a primal Germanic mother, in whose beautiful face there were not wanting passion and fierceness—whoso reads the rest of the play may learn the pitiless brutal vengeance which Thusnelda wreaked upon Ventidius—not wanting her elements of 'the tiger and the ape.' And yet how grand she was—how majestic! And how tameless looked this Teuton princess! It was not fear that troubled her—she felt no fear—but anger, and boundless haughty astonishment. The Roman women, forsooth! What was she to them, or they to her? She felt as if she could crush a dozen of them with one blow of her ample hand.

This picture was shown twice. Wilhelmi rubbed his hands in rapture.

'Splendid!' he cried, 'worth coming miles to see. Didn't she do it grandly?—didn't she look every inch the Teuton queen?'

'Max might have given me one look!' said Luise; 'he *knew* I was in the very front row. I shall scold him about it.'

'Foolish baby! I forbid thee to do anything of the kind. Where would the picture have been if he had been ludicrously rolling his eyes about in search of thee? And why should he look for thee? Was not Thusnelda his lawful consort?' said her father, delighted to torment her if possible.

Luise was about to make some malicious retort, when an official came and whispered something to Wilhelmi, who, with an exclamation of pleased surprise—a '*Nun, das freut mich!*'—rose, and made his way towards the bottom of the crowded room.

The third picture was soon put on the stage. It was a 'Village Funeral,' and was excellently well done, but it lacked the poetry and excitement of the last scene. The cur-

tain went down, and still the Professor did not return. Sara remained behind the scenes ; she took a part in the next picture—the part of a lady of high degree, on whose 'Yes' or 'No' her lover of low degree waits anxiously. There was a long interval, full of noise and talking and laughing. When the curtain rose again, Wilhelmi had still not returned ; and Luise, who was never happy without him at such a scene, muttered discontentedly, '*Wo bleibt denn der Papa?*'

This picture—this *Ja, oder Nein*—had an interest, apart from its style and subject, in the fact that it was the last one finished by the artist who had died.

A long, old-fashioned, richly-furnished room was displayed, and, standing in the midst of the grandeur, plainly dressed, proud and upright, a young man in the costume of the present day. He was handsome, and had a fine, open, resolute face. The expression of earnest, attentive, eager waiting, not degenerating into anxiety or servility, was

admirable. Nothing showed that he was nervous—he had not taken the trouble to get himself up in visiting costume. It appeared that he had been walking: his shoes were dusty and travel-soiled, his dress a rather shabby grey suit, hands gloveless, wrists cuffless, nothing either costly or fashionable about him; and yet, one of nature's gentlemen. His white straw-hat lies on a table beside him. He has been speaking, you see, probably strongly, earnestly, and ardently, and now he waits the answer. The young lady who stands before him, in a highly fashionable costume of the present day, as rich and costly as his is poor and worn, holds a fan in one hand, and with the other seems to be half closing it. The attitude is one of reflection, of pausing; the eyes are downcast. Will she say 'Yes,' or 'No'?

Beautiful groups of vine-reapers, primæval forests, and historical legends have their charms, no doubt; but a yet more potent spell is excited when the poetry is touched

which underlies this present-day life of ours—when romance is manifest, clothed in a grey tweed suit and a fashionable afternoon costume. He is unabashed by her wealth and splendour. Will she resent his audacity, or accept it? In the painting there was a sweet mystery: none could say, from looking at it, what course would be taken by that fair lady. Sara Ford was perhaps thinking of some past scene. There was the shadow of an expression upon her face which caused a murmur:

'After all, she will say yes.'

It was at this juncture—just when the interest was deepest, when necks were being craned forward, and whispers exchanged—comments upon him and her: 'How well Ludwig does it!'—'Of course she will say yes!'—'How *wild* Amalia Waldschmidt would be if she saw Ludwig now!' and so on, that Professor Wilhelmi, accompanied by another man, returned to his seat. There was an empty chair next to Avice Wellfield,

and the stranger took it, and fixed his eyes upon the *lebendes Bild* on the stage. Suddenly the face of the lady became no more like the face of a picture. It changed—it was certainly a living face. Most distinctly her eyes moved, her expression altered; some persons said afterwards that she had started, but that may be a libel. What is quite certain is, that the expression of the face did change, and that the gentleman who had come in with Professor Wilhelmi turned to Avice Wellfield with a smile, and remarked in a low voice:

'Miss Ford has recognised me, and is so surprised to see me that she has moved.'

'Do you know Miss Ford?' asked Avice, not moving her eyes from the picture.

'Yes,' replied Rudolf Falkenberg. 'I met her a month or two ago at Ems—Nassau, rather, at the Countess of Trockenau's.'

He continued to gaze intently at the living picture, while Miss Ford on her part soon had her features and expression entirely under

her own control again. She posed admirably for the remainder of the scene, and for the repetition of it which was stormily demanded. The shade of expression on the lady's face was of the very slightest; but it was enough for the audience to be all of one mind as to what it meant, and 'She will have him' was the universal verdict.

At last the curtain finally fell upon this picture, and with it ended Sara's share in the performance. The two last '*Bilder*' were also admirably done, but they did not excite the interest which had been called out by the last. One was a scene from Schiller's *Wallenstein*, and the other from Goethe's *Egmont*.

In the bustle of the interval ensuing between the two last pictures, Sara came into the room with Wilhelmi, who had been behind the scenes to fetch her away. Everyone was standing up, and almost everyone in animated conversation, so that Miss Ford gained her place almost unobserved.

Not altogether unnoticed, though, for before anyone else could speak, Falkenberg had held out his hand with a smile, saying:

'Thus we meet again, Miss Ford.'

'Not exactly "thus,"' said Sara, laughing. 'I saw you suddenly, and was so surprised that I am afraid I moved, or laughed, or something. The impulse to bow to you, and say "How do you do?" below the breath, as one does, was almost irresistible.'

'I ought to have remained in the background where I was, and from whence I saw you in Thusnelda. I would not have disturbed *that* for the world.'

'And that reminds me,' here observed Fräulein Wilhelmi in a plaintive voice, 'Miss Ford, where is my poor Max?'

'Behind the scenes, dressing for Egmont,' replied Sara, laughing.

'I shall never consent to this sort of thing again,' said Luise. 'Or if I do, I shall take a part as well. Did you only come to-day,

Herr Falkenberg, or did papa know that you intended to visit us ?'

'No ; I only decided yesterday to come, and I only arrived by the evening train from Frankfort. I went to your house, and found where you all were, and came here.'

'Of course you are staying with us, as usual ?' observed Luise.

'Your father has kindly asked me to do so,' he replied, smiling.

Sara, watching his face, felt an indescribable satisfaction in it, and as if an old friend, and one who could be trusted, had suddenly been present. Those were the same honest, critical brown eyes which had looked kindly upon her, as they sat and spoke of friendship in the little *Ruheplatz* beneath the cathedral walls at Lahnburg. As for Falkenberg, after the first words of greeting, he scarcely spoke to Sara, but allowed himself to be monopolised by Luise, who, true to her nature, had flirted with him, or tried to do so, since she was two years old. Though he did not

speak much to Sara, his eyes wandered now and then towards her with an inquiring, considerate expression. She was very quiet, but looked marvellously handsome, in her black velvet gown and pearl necklace. Excitement, pleasure, high, strong emotion, never made her talkative, but they brought a soft glow to her dark grey eyes, which beautified her wonderfully. To-night the pleasure had been very great, the excitement very strong, and she looked proportionately splendid.

Here the curtain went up for the last picture, and when that was over, came the crush to get out of the hall.

'Look here, *mein Bester!*' observed Wilhelmi to Herr Falkenberg. 'My womenkind will be more than enough for me. Will you take Miss Ford and Miss Wellfield under your charge, and see them home?'

'With pleasure,' was the reply; and with an exchange of hasty good-nights, the Wilhelmis were carried forward in the crowd,

while Falkenberg and the two English girls made their way slowly after them.

Seated in their *Droschke*, and driving towards the Jägerstrasse, Falkenberg said:

'May I call at your atelier soon, Miss Ford, as I am staying here? I dare say I shall be at the Wilhelmis' for some little time.'

'I shall be very glad if you will,' responded Sara; 'though,' she added, after a pause, 'I am afraid there is not much for you to see.'

'To-morrow afternoon,' he suggested, 'or will you be too tired?'

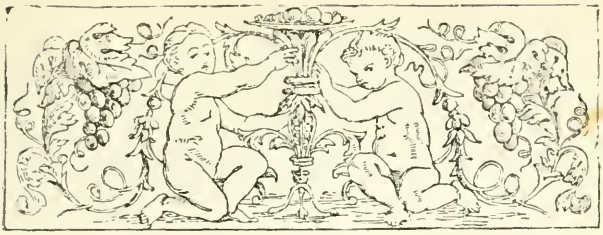
'I shall not be tired at all. Pray come, and have coffee with me, if you care to remain.'

'Thank you. I shall not fail,' he answered, as the cab stopped, and he handed them out.

'We all owe you a debt of thanks, *mein Fräulein*, for acting as you did to-night,' he said, as he shook hands with her.

'I am glad you were pleased, and I hope the affair will bring some money to poor little Frau Goldmark. Then, till to-morrow, Herr Falkenberg.'

'Till to-morrow. *Gute nacht, meine Damen.*'



CHAPTER IV.

HERR FALKENBERG'S FRIENDSHIP.

'Oh, snows so pure—oh, peaks so high,
I lift to you a hopeless eye;
I see your icy ramparts drawn,
Between the sleepers and the dawn.
* * * * *
I see you, passionless and pure,
Above the lightnings stand secure;
But may not climb . . . .'

WHEN Herr Falkenberg arrived the following afternoon in the Jägerstrasse, he found Miss Ford alone in her atelier. She had sent Avice out with Ellen, she told him, to walk off the excitement of yesterday.

'I am glad you have come early,' she

added, 'while it is yet to-day. The evenings darken down so quickly now, don't they ?'

'Yes, very; but for me, these chilly autumn evenings have a great fascination.'

'Have they ? And for me too. Do you know, there is nothing I like better than to put on my hat and shawl on a fine, sharp October evening, such as this is going to be, before it is quite dark, while the sky is still light ; in fact, just at the time the lamplighter goes his rounds. There is a strange, unusual feeling in the air, and people go by like figures in a dream.'

'I know the feeling. And what is your favourite haunt at such times ?'

'I like to pass through some of the most crowded streets first, then gradually to leave them and walk through the quieter Allee, till I get to the Hofgarten. I never get tired of it, small though it is. That well-worn round space, called the *Schöne Aussicht*, remains my favourite spot. Very few people go there at this season, and at that time in the

evening. I can sit, or stand, or pace about as long as I choose, and watch the Rhine, and the remains of the sunset, and the bridge of boats, and think of all the villages which the distance hides. It is very beautiful, I think, though you may laugh at me for saying so.'

'I am not all inclined to laugh, for I like the same kind of thing myself. I have a special fondness for the "still, sad music of humanity," which one comprehends best at such times.'

'Yes, it is a music worth listening to. But the music of humanity is not always sad, Herr Falkenberg, is it?'

'No,' said Rudolf, looking down at her. He was standing, Sara was seated on a low chair, leaning forward, and looking up at him with an earnest, large gaze, and in her eyes was so deep, so triumphant and secure a happiness, that he could not fail to see it—it made her face glorious with its reflection. Falkenberg, looking at her, repressed the

words of admiration he would fain have uttered, and sighed before he answered her, in his usual courteous, collected fashion. 'No,' he repeated; 'it is often glad, I think, and when it is so, it is very glad. Pardon me, Miss Ford,' he went on, with a slight smile, 'I think it has been glad for you lately; you look as if your life's music were pitched just now in a major key.'

Her cheek flushed, and her eyes fell, as she answered, in a low tone:

'Yes, I have had a great happiness lately. I am very happy.'

'I am very glad to hear it,' said he, and he was at no loss to guess to what kind of happiness she alluded. If he had been—his eyes fell upon her hands, clasped upon her knee, and upon the solitary sapphire hoop which decked the third finger of the left hand, with the broad tight gold guard above. That was enough. He had observed her hands in days gone by, and then, he knew, when they were at Ems and Nassau, she

had worn several rings, old-fashioned, but valuable—a diamond one, and a pearl and emerald one, and others. They were gone. Nothing remained but the sapphire hoop.

'Let me congratulate you on your happiness,' he added, 'and forgive my saying that the ring you wear is a good omen. Those blue stones mean steadfastness and faith.'

'Yes, I know. Those qualities are about the best things we can have. Don't you think so?'

'They are very good things,' he replied slowly, as he thought within himself, 'Two can be steadfast: one may steadfastly give up, as well as steadfastly cling to a thing.'

'Are you not tired with your exertions last night?' he asked.

'I—oh no! I am very strong; I do not easily get tired. I should like always to feel as I did feel last night: as if nothing would ever be difficult again, as if one's powers would easily sweep away every obstacle. Do

you know, in the scene from Hermann and Thusnelda, I was wishing, with all my heart, that I was here in my atelier, with an appropriate subject. I felt as if I could have painted then.'

'Yes, one lives a full life at such moments. That reminds me that at this season daylight rapidly departs. May I not see your pictures now?'

'With pleasure, such as they are,' she answered, rising, and pushing an easel round, so as to show the picture in the best light.

'This is but a sketch,' said he, standing before it. 'Have you nothing finished?'

'N—no,' said Sara, pausing; and as she forced herself to make the calculation, she found that she had never finished anything since her visit to Ems; since she had known Jerome Wellfield.

'I have finished nothing lately,' she exclaimed, struck with the thought, and involuntarily speaking out her reflections.

'I finish nothing now. I begin things, and then the impulse fades away, and they are neglected.'

'It is as well not to insist upon working out every crude attempt,' he said—and she thought his face took an expression of gravity, as he continued to look at the sketch—'because if you do that, you are not an artist any more, but a machine; but it is also well occasionally to persevere in carrying out some conception, even if you do not find yourself altogether in sympathy with your first idea. That is discipline, which in moderation is good. What is this?' he added, so drily, and so abruptly, that she started.

'That?' she answered, a little hurriedly; 'oh, it was a verse from a little poem of Sully Prudhomme's which struck my fancy. Where is it?'

She found a scrap of paper on the edge of the easel, on which paper were scribbled Sully Prudhomme's exquisite little lines, *Si*

vous saviez. The verse she had tried to illustrate was the one running:

'Si vous saviez ce que fait naître
Dans l'âme triste un pur regard,
Vous regarderiez ma fenêtre
Comme au hasard.'

'It is not very good,' said Sara, apologetically; 'it is a stupid, sentimental little thing after all.'

'As you have sketched it, it is,' he answered, and said no more.

Sara, with an uneasy thrill of feeling, remembered his words to her at Trockenau: 'If I thought it atrocious, I am afraid I should say it was so, much though I might dislike having to do it.'

She felt that he had just now said 'atrocious,' or something very like it, and her heart sank. Silently she placed another canvas above the first. It was a vague, indistinct scene; what appeared some wild, wind-blown trees on rising ground to the left—clouds riven asunder, and silvered by a

moon which did not actually appear; the hint of a deep, rapid, sullen stream, with tall rushes, in the foreground.

'That is imaginary!' he said abruptly 'You did not go to Nature for this.'

'No, not altogether. It is—it is only a sketch.'

'Scarcely that. Is it meant to typify anything?'

'I believe I was thinking of Shelley's stanzas: "Away! the moor is dark beneath the moon!" But it is bad. I have failed, she added, a sudden sense of being very small and insignificant rushing over her, and also a conviction of how entirely she had failed.

'Yes, you have failed,' he answered, somewhat sarcastically. 'I should not imagine, in the first place, that you knew what the lines meant.'

'No, I don't think I do,' Sara owned, deprecatingly.

'Let us hope you never may. The

meaning, when you come at it, is bitter—as bitter as anything well can be. Well'—he turned to her, and looked her in the face, with eyes which she felt were full of severity and full of concern—'is that all?'

'It is all I can show you,' she replied hastily, 'when I see how displeased you are.'

'You are afraid of hearing the truth?' asked Falkenberg, with a mocking smile.

With compressed lips, and a face which had grown pale, she threw a cover from another canvas, a larger one, on a second easel, and, leaving him to study it, turned away, and stood at the window, looking out, her heart beating so wildly that its throbs deafened her. Yet she heard him say:

'Ah! at least one knows what this is intended for.'

It was a sketch merely, all except the head of the figure, in neutral first tints; and there was certainly no mistaking the subject. A man's figure in imperial robes, leaning eagerly forward, stretching out his hands; his

eyes fixed, his lips parted towards the sun, which suddenly bursts with a flood of light into the room, and illumines the desk and tablets, on which he had been inscribing his great *Hymn.* One could just catch this meaning; and the head of Julian the Apostate, which was boldly finished and beautiful, was a likeness of Jerome.

'H'm!' observed Falkenberg. 'The Apostate—a curious idea.' Then, after a pause, 'I suppose that *is* all?'

'All, except the studies I am doing with Herr Wilhelmi,' she said, feeling all the pretty conceits with which she had tried to gloss over her work, small in amount, poor in execution, of the last three months, swept away, as cobwebs might be swept from a roof, till not a trace remained.

'And has the Herr Professor praised your performances of late?'

'He has not—he has blamed them,' said she, her cheek burning, but firmly resolved to confess the worst—to conceal nothing.'

'It would have been odd indeed if he had done so. Has he seen this last one that I have just been looking at?'

'No one has seen it but yourself,' she replied, almost inaudibly.

'It is not quite so bad as the other two. The head shows some signs of good workmanship, but the whole thing is poor and meretricious; and you know it is. Those other two studies, or attempts at studies, show a distinct and visible falling off. They are not so good by a long way as the little sketch you showed me at Trockenau. They are careless, sketchy, weak, and horribly amateurish. They are second-rate in every way—fit for magazine woodcuts—but as works of art! They are dreadful, and quite destitute of workmanship, and I am very sorry to see them.'

'Oh, Herr Falkenberg!' she exclaimed, aghast. 'You—but I deserve it. They are all that you say.'

She spoke with a proud humility, but her

voice was stifled with suppressed sobs. His relentless words had aroused, as if by magic, the old spirit of eager ambition which, until a few months ago, had animated her. It was as if some one roughly shook her from some pleasant drowsy dream back into reality. In her own mind she had tried—not very successfully, it is true, but still with the effect of lulling herself into contentment—to call those inadequate attempts at pictures 'vague fancies,' 'thoughts too subtle at once to take shape.' Consummate criticism, neutral, calm and unimpassioned, fixed its piercing eyes upon them, and instantly pronounced them—daubs.

She had come nearer to him as she spoke. Now she turned away again, consumed by a feeling of burning, scorching shame, and walked back to the window, and stood there, feeling utterly miserable. 'Love is enough,' she had lately read somewhere; but it was not true, she found—it did not support or comfort her under this just condemnation.

It did not enable her to feel callous and indifferent under the disapproval and displeasure of such a man as Rudolf Falkenberg.

She remained standing by the window. He had begun to pace about the studio, his hands clasped behind him. Presently he spoke :

'I congratulated you just now on your happiness,' he said. 'If this is to be the result, I must withdraw those congratulations.'

'Herr Falkenberg, don't — please don't say that!' she implored, in a voice that was pitiable, though so low.

'But I must, if you allow it thus to enervate you — to emasculate your power. Pardon my frankness, and what may seem my intrusiveness ; but you know my motives. Do you mean to give up your art ?'

'No—oh no! I never thought of such a thing.'

'Then look to what you are doing. Such things as those you have showed me—such

thin, weak, boneless, bloodless things are a mere prostitution of one of the noblest and most glorious of arts. For heaven's sake, if you do not intend to do better than that, give it up altogether. Surely you are above such amateur dabbling, such sentimental prettinesses—you, who might do well and worthily, even nobly, I believe, if you only would. And, if you intend to persevere, let me tell you that the "happiness," or the "good fortune," or whatsoever it may be, which degrades your powers instead of expanding them, is *bad*. Sorrow rightly borne, and noble joy rightly worn, should elevate, not degrade. There is no evading this law, and no escaping it for those who have souls at all; and I was firmly convinced that you had. What has one of your own countrymen said, one of the most consummate art-critics that ever lived? He has said just the same thing—"accurately, in proportion to the rightness of the cause, and the purity of the emotion, is the possibility of the fine

art— . . . . with absolute precision, from the highest to the lowest, the fineness of the possible art is an index of the moral purity and majesty of the emotion it expresses." That is one of the hardest things ever written, and one of the truest. Measure yourself by it, with *those*—and where are you ?'

Sara had cast herself into a chair, and with her hands before her face, was controlling her sobs as best she might. Never before had she felt thus humbled and scorched, and burnt up, as it were. It was terrible, yet not one pang of anger or resentment mingled with her emotion. She knew that what he said was just—no more, no less; and being noble, she liked him the better for his having said it. There was no carping, no prejudice or temper in what he said—no scolding for the sake of rousing her to retort or to deprecate; there was the sorrowful, stern condemnation of one who knew she had belied herself, and had sufficient regard for her to tell her so, and she bowed to it.

He did not speak for a little time, and gradually her sobs grew quieter. At last he stopped before her, and said:

'Miss Ford!'

Sara removed her hands from before her face, picked up her handkerchief, dried her eyes with it, and looked at him. His eyes were full of kindness; they were not hard; his face was not the face of a hard judge, and his voice was soothing as he said:

'I do not beg you to forgive me for what I have said to you. If you are what I take you to be, that is not necessary. I do not say I am sorry to have wounded you. I honour you so much as to feel sure that you appreciate my reasons for so speaking. But I ask you, do you know yourself the reason of this quick and lamentable falling off?'

'Yes, I know it,' she replied, looking at him with a face pale indeed, but with eyes which did not waver. 'The reason is, that I have dreamed of myself and my own happiness to the exclusion of everything else. I

have let my love master me, instead of being myself master of my love. And I am punished for it.'

'And will you go on dreaming? Will you not rather try to awaken?'

Sara looked at him, and thought of Jerome —of the love she bore him. Subdue that, make it bondslave to her art, second to something else? She knew that if she meant to be what she had all along striven for—a great artist, that she must do so; the question was, could she? Had she not been in reality the slave of her love for Wellfield, since it had arisen, since he had told her he loved her? Not confessedly so, but indeed, and in fact? Yes, it was so. It suddenly dawned upon her mind that such love might be absorbing—might be exquisite at the time; but her nobler self told her that it was not good to be bound hand and foot in the bonds of this passion, that it was unworthy, that she had yielded to the infatuation that paralyses, not the love that inspires.

'I cannot be free in a moment,' said she, 'but I can endeavour to be so. I will try, and I give you my hand upon it.'

With a simple, proud gesture, she placed her hand in his. He knew what she meant. That love of hers was not to be given up; she held it holy, justifiable. But she was no longer to be its bondslave.

'Well,' he thought, 'it is doubtful, but if there is a woman who can do it, she can.'

He grasped her hand firmly.

'And our friendship?' he asked.

'Do you still wish for my friendship, Herr Falkenberg?'

'Now, more than ever, your friendship appears precious and desirable to me.'

'It is yours, so long as you care to keep it,' she answered. 'At least, do not desert me till I have found the strait and narrow path again.'

'That is not hard,' he answered. 'Go to Nature, and paint the humblest plant you can find—the most rugged visage you may

meet in the street, but paint it—you know how, as well as I do. Do not smear into it your own vague fancies. Study it, to find what God has hidden behind its exterior covering. Think of it and its meaning; not of yourself, and what you would like it to be. Reverence, reverence, and for ever reverence, as that same great countryman of yours has said; and I promise you that if it be but a tuft of dandelions, or the head of the most weather-beaten *Mütterchen* on the market-place, it shall be more worth hanging up and looking at than a thousand of those things.'

'Your sayings are hard, but true,' she answered, with a return of life in her cheek and eye; 'and I thank you for your lesson, though it has been a stern one. Only tell me—you don't despair of me?'

'I never felt such confidence in you as I do now,' he replied, with a smile, and looking at her as if he wished she would return it. But Sara could not do that yet. She sat still, resting her cheek on her hand, and

he paced about the studio talking to her, his heart beating fast too, thinking.

'Fine-tempered—true and pure gold. Does the man know what sort of a woman he has won? Judging by my own experience of such affairs—not.'

When Avice came in from her walk, she found Sara and Herr Falkenberg in the parlour, looking over engravings. Then Ellen hastened to bring the coffee, and Rudolf disburthened his mind of an invitation committed to his charge by Fräulein Wilhelmi, bidding Sara to a musical party on the following evening. She promised to go; and he, departing, held her hand somewhat long as he asked:

'You have understood, I hope?'

'Perfectly, and am grateful.'

'Then, till to-morrow evening,' he replied, bowing, and taking his departure.

CHAPTER V.

THE LION AND THE MOUSE.

ON the following evening, Sara, when she arrived at the Wilhelmis', found a large, gay party assembled, consisting chiefly of those who had distinguished themselves in the *lebenden Bildern* the night before, or who had given useful service in preparing them. Sara was almost shocked to recognise, amongst others, little Frau Goldmark, for whose benefit the entertainment had been given. To her intense nature it appeared strange and even indecorous that the young widow should present herself in this sparkling mixed com-

pany—under the circumstances. Certainly she did not put herself forward; she sat on an ottoman, in a rather retired corner, from which she did not move, and those who desired to have speech of her could do so by going and talking to her. Sara found herself near her during the evening, and, at the moment, no one else was close to them. She turned and spoke to her, wishing her good-evening rather gravely. Indeed, since yesterday afternoon, she had felt grave, though by no means sad. She had reflected upon Falkenberg's strictures, and the more she thought upon the subject the more convinced she was that he had spoken the words of justice—of truth and soberness.

'Ah, Miss Ford!' exclaimed Frau Goldmark, effusively, 'how very much I have to thank you for!'

'Do not mention it, Frau Goldmark. What little I could do, I did with great pleasure; and I am very glad if it succeeded.'

'*Ach, ungeheuer!*' cried she, using an exaggerated expression not beloved of Sara, who wondered more and more that the little woman had not had the sense to remain at home—'*Ungeheuer!* it will be a small fortune to me. It is entirely your influence, of course, *liebes Fräulein*, which has induced Herr Falkenberg to be so generous. And I, who had been thinking that the picture was only so much buried capital, that never would be realised!'

'I am afraid I don't understand you,' said Sara, becoming conscious that some event of which she knew nothing was alluded to, and aware, too, of a disagreeably significant meaning in the smile with which Frau Goldmark looked at her.

'But you must know surely that, yesterday morning, Herr Falkenberg went straight to the *Ausstellung*, where my husband's picture hung, and that he bought it—bought it then and there; and when Herr Lohe of the *Ausstellung* said that it was a fine picture,

Herr Falkenberg replied that to anyone who had seen Miss Ford in that character the night before, it could not fail to be a fine picture. Now, what do you think ?'

Frau Goldmark laughed, never having imagined that she would have the good fortune to be the first to communicate this news to Miss Ford. The reply surprised and appalled her.

'I think your information most uncalled for, and that, if true, it is not of the slightest importance to me,' replied the young lady, raising her head to its utmost height, and, without deigning another word, walking away.

Frau Goldmark recoiled. She had imagined that the information would be considered most piquant and gratifying, and behold, the result had been annihilation almost.

Though Sara had walked away with such dignity, a most unpleasant sensation had taken possession of her. It was most unlike all she knew of Falkenberg that he should

make such a vulgar remark as that would certainly have been; and yet the glibness with which Frau Goldmark had repeated it, staggered her. She stood, absently conversing with Ludwig Maas, the very man with whom she had acted in the picture, and was chiefly conscious of repenting bitterly that she had ever taken any part in the affair, and Herr Maas was wondering a little why Miss Ford, who, with all her dignity, had been so sociable and pleasant to him two days ago, should wear so cold and unapproachable an expression this evening, when Falkenberg came up to them.

'Miss Ford,' said he, 'I have been talking to Frau Goldmark.'

'Indeed!' was the frigid reply.

'I had better go,' decided Ludwig within himself; and with a murmured excuse he left them.

'Yes,' pursued Rudolf. 'I saw that she had offended you by something she had said. She is a tiresome, vulgar little woman, who

used to annoy me a good deal in former days when I had dealings with her husband.'

'I can quite imagine it,' said Sara, 'but as I feel quite indifferent towards her, we need not talk about her.'

There was a laugh in Falkenberg's eyes as he said:

'But I do not feel at all indifferent towards her, finding as I do, that she has been misrepresenting me to you.'

Sara's face flushed, and her head was lifted again.

'Pray let us leave the subject,' she said.

'No, I must ask you as a favour to hear me. Frau Goldmark has a way of putting the cart before the horse sometimes, which, if innocent, is still annoying. She told you that *I* had said to Herr Lohe—something which, if I had said it, under the circumstances, would have been the height of impertinence, though the poor little woman seems to imagine that it was a charming compliment.'

'Well, and did you not say it?' she asked, still in the same unapproachable manner.

'Can you for a moment suspect me of it? I observed to Herr Lohe that it was a charming picture, upon which he threw up his hands, exclaiming, "*Ach! mein Herr*, it was always charming, but since one has seen Miss Ford in it, it is *à ravir*."'

Sara smiled involuntarily. Herr Lohe was a well-known character in the Elberthal artist world. The words and the manner were so exactly his, that she could no longer have even a shade of doubt on the matter.

'I beg your pardon,' she said, all the stiffness melting suddenly from her attitude and expression, 'for ever listening to such a story. It took me by surprise.'

'Now you look less terrible, and more human,' he said, laughing; 'less like those "snows so pure, those peaks so high," to which the poet said he lifted "a hopeless eye."'

'You are laughing at me,' said Sara,

laughing in her turn. 'I felt insulted, I confess. What a tiresome, mischievous little woman that is!'

'Very. But,' he added earnestly, and in a low voice, 'you were not insulted yesterday, when I said some rather strong things to you, the reverse of complimentary, and yet now——'

'That was quite different,' she replied, her cheek flushing again. 'And you know it, Herr Falkenberg; but you wish to torment me because you think I am exaggerated in everything.'

'Since that is your opinion of my opinion of you, let it stand,' was all he would reply.

Frau Goldmark sat in her corner, and watched the proceedings from afar. After having been made so much of for so long, this was a grievous way in which to be treated. Her feelings were assuredly akin to those expressed by the oysters when the walrus and the carpenter threatened to eat them.

'After such kindness, that would be
A dismal thing to do.'

'*Lieber Himmel!*' thought Frau Goldmark, who was accustomed, even mentally, to the use of exaggerated expressions, 'how could I know? But who does know what will please an Englishwoman? Not I, I am sure. I wish I had given her back her stare, but I never have my wits about me at the right moment, and I dare say she thought I was overwhelmed with confusion. And when he came up to me'—here an expression akin to cunning developed itself upon Frau Goldmark's face—'these men think they have but to speak, and that then we believe them. He "thought I had made a mistake," indeed. Whether I may have been mistaken about that or not, can I not see him now, talking to her, and the look in his eyes? Bah! it is easy enough to see what it all means. People like her think they have a right to toss their heads if one hazards a joke. Would not she be glad enough to

catch him, if she could? And if she does, will it not be through me that they have been brought together—their happiness made out of my misfortune? *Ach, ja!*'

Which leads one to reflect that there is a celebrated fable concerning a lion and a mouse, which relates how the former magnanimously thanked the latter on being set free from his toils through that humble agency—leads one also to wonder a little what some mice might feel supposing they had received favours of crushing importance from the kingly beast, and had later been rebuked for flippancy of behaviour. Perhaps the feelings of the mouse on such an occasion might not be altogether without resemblance to those just now entertained by Frau Goldmark towards her two most substantial benefactors.

Late the following evening, Falkenberg was pacing up and down the space jutting out from the Hofgarten towards the river, and known as the Schöne Aussicht.

(Schöne Aussicht—Belle Vue—Bella Vista: why have we no name for it in England, we who have so much of the thing itself?) It was the very hour which Sara had mentioned as being her favonrite one for strolling about. Had Falkenberg had any idea of meeting her there? Hardly. He was scarcely the man to go with such a purpose, especially in the case of Sara Ford. He had come, partly because he wished to be alone, and partly because she had said she loved the place. So much he confessed to himself; nor did it disturb him in that he knew it was a dream that he cherished.

He was thinking about her now as he paced about, thinking of what she had said about loving to watch the river, the Rhine. Falkenberg watched it too, as it flowed majestically along, eleven hundred feet across, from one low flat bank to the other, making a low, sedate music as he seemed to march by, with his grand, broad, unintermittent sweep, having gathered in might

and volume during his long journey past castle and crag and town, between the walls of Mainz and beneath the frowning escarpments of Ehrenbreitstein, between rock and vineyard and village and hamlet, until he came to proud Cologne, the fairest gem in his crown, and then, broader and stronger and older and greyer, went sweeping on past the other villages and towns, towards Rotterdam and Holland and the sea.

Rudolf saw not another human creature. He ceased his walk, and placed himself on one of the benches looking towards the river, and, leaning his elbow on the back of it, smoked, and abstractedly watched a great American Rhine steamer, with *Kaiser Wilhelm* inscribed on her paddle-box, which was steaming slowly into the harbour to stay there and be repaired before the next tourist season began. The lights on her poop and deck cast bright rays athwart the sullen grey of the stream, but he did not see them though he was looking at them.

'I wish she was not engaged to this fellow,' he thought. 'It's young Wellfield, I suppose, unless I was very much deceived by what I saw at Trockenau that night. I may do him injustice, but I have an idea that when all comes to the point, he will look first to his precious self. It is not surprising if he is both vain and selfish, after the ordeal he has gone through of flattery and gratuitous love affairs and desperate cases, and girls who have made fools of themselves about him. But it is a pity that at last a noble woman should have fallen a victim. God forgive me if I do the lad injustice. I hope I do. One can but wait the event.'

He knocked the ash from his cigar, and gazed across the river at the outline, now very dim, of a battered-looking tree on the opposite shore.

'It is time I came to some conclusion,' he thought. 'I have been dangling here long enough. I have her friendship—I see and know that her love is given elsewhere. It

would be simple madness in me to try to win it. I am only burning my fingers and making a fool of myself by remaining here—and getting more in love with her every day. . . . . Ay, and I do love her!'

He flung his cigar away, and leaned forward, gazing intently out into the darkness, thinking.

'If ever I had the chance of marrying her —if by any means I could induce her to take me, I would do it, let the risk be what it might . . . . Shall I stay a little longer? Is the pleasure worth the concomitant pain? When I know that I may not tell her I love her, any more than she, if she loved me, could tell me so.'

As he thus reflected, and reflected, too, that it was all a chance—everything was a chance —he watched how two men on the big steamer threw out a rope to two men in a little boat which was rocking in the swell in the wake of the big one. Twice they threw, and missed; then prepared to cast it out a third time.

'If they catch it this time,' decided Rudolf, 'I'll stay; if they miss again, I'll say good-bye to her to-morrow, and go home.'

A third throw of the rope, a lurch of the little boat, and the cry:

'*Gut! Jetzt hab' ich's.*'

'I stay. *Gut!* I take my holiday in Elberthal instead of in Rome. What does it matter to anyone but myself?'

He arose, and walked straight back to Wilhelmi's house, where there was, as usual, a large company, many of whom had been invited expressly to meet him. He went amongst them, and made himself agreeable to them for the rest of the evening. He promised himself a month's holiday from now. The chances were — for something happening to Sara, to Jerome, to anyone, which should lead events in the direction he desired—one. Against that, ten thousand. And for the sake of the one he stayed.

CHAPTER VI.

UNAWARES.

'What's this thought,
Shapeless and shadowy, that keeps flitting round
Like some dumb creature that sees coming danger,
And breaks its heart, trying in vain to speak?'

PERHAPS Sara Ford was the solitary person who never gave a thought as to why Rudolf Falkenberg paid so long a visit to the Wilhelmis'. Everyone else, from Frau Goldmark upwards, had arrived at the same conclusion, and felt a just and honourable pride in his own astuteness—the conclusion that Herr Falkenberg was what is euphoniously called, 'paying

attention' to Miss Ford. He knew the report well himself, and knowing that to the principal person concerned—herself—it was as if it had not been, and not caring a straw what was said or thought about him, he took no trouble to enlighten anyone on the subject. He came and went like an old friend in and out of Sara's presence. He was perfectly certain that Jerome Wellfield was kept fully informed of all that was said and done in their interviews, and that being so, he felt that he had no other person to account to for his action in the matter. And he knew that his presence invigorated and did her good. She had cast aside all her dreamy fancies, and had gone humbly to Nature, as he had bidden her do, and Nature had not betrayed 'the heart that loved her.' Sara had made some studies, on seeing which, Wilhelmi, all unconscious of what had gone before, had drawn a long breath of relief, saying, '*Was, Kind!* You are again coming to your senses.' Falken-

berg had not frowned, if he had not smiled at them; he had said:

'So you have laid hold of the clue at last, which leads back to the narrow path?'

'I shall never rest,' said Sara, cheerfully, 'until I have done something which you will not scorn to hang up somewhere near the roof of your picture-gallery. Then I shall feel sure that I not only have the clue, but am back on the stony road again.'

'Some day you will do something which the world will not allow to be buried in any picture-gallery of mine. Patience, patience, and ever patience!'

It was the morning after they had held this conversation. Sara and Avice were seated at breakfast.

'I wonder,' observed the latter, 'whether Jerome will come over here for Christmas? Do you think he will? Does he ever say anything to you?'

'Never,' said Sara, with a smile. 'But I have very little doubt that he will come.'

'It would be so delightful—a real German Christmas at the Wilhelmis', with a tree, and everything proper.'

'For that matter, you may have a tree here, if you like. But—ah, here's the postman. And a letter from Jerome,' she added, as she took it from Ellen's hand, and read it.

'DEAREST SARA,

'I write in exceeding haste to tell you that an excellent opportunity offers for Avice to come to England. My friend Father Somerville, of whom I have so often spoken to you, is travelling at present in Belgium on business connected with the college. He has to visit Cologne before his return, and means to travel by way of Elberthal, Rotterdam, and Harwich, and he has offered to take charge of my sister. He will be about two days in Elberthal, and I asked him to call upon you at once, to explain his arrangements. I expect it will be the end of this week before he arrives.

This had all been arranged in such haste that I could not possibly let you know before. And now I have no time to write as I should wish to do. I have had troubles—money troubles. I will explain as soon as I am able to write to you. Meantime this must go to the post. Excuse its hastiness. Give my love to my sister, and believe me,

'Your devoted

'J. W.'

When Sara had finished reading this letter, she passed her hand over her eyes, trembling strangely. She could not understand it. It was like some hateful, inexplicable nightmare. That the hand which had all along caressed, should thus suddenly strike—and strike hard—passed her comprehension. The voice which had been so tender was in a moment shouting out a harsh command. No reasons given—no one word of explanation as to why Avice was so suddenly to be taken away from her. It was incredible. There had

never been any spoken or written agreement, but always a tacit understanding that Avice was to remain with her until she and Jerome were married, and that then she should share their home. It seemed it was not to be so.

'What is the matter, Sara? Has anything happened to Jerome—tell me!'

For all answer, Sara handed her the letter. She could not speak—could not explain it.

'What—why?' exclaimed the girl, in a tone of dismay. 'I do not understand.'

'Nor I, dear!' was the answer. 'I know exactly as much about it as you do.'

'I am sure I don't want to go travelling with this strange man—carried off as if I had done something wrong,' said Avice, less and less charmed with the prospect.

'If you have to go, I shall see that you do not go alone,' was all Sara could answer. She could eat no more. She rose from her chair. Leaving Avice with the letter, to follow her own devices, she retired to her atelier, and there tried to reason it all out,

and comprehend it — and failed. It grew more inexplicable, and more horrible, the more thought she gave to it, until at last an idea flashed into her mind, which left her cold and trembling and miserable, with a misery such as she had never known before. Had any change come over him?—did he love her less? She laughed at it, put it aside, argued it away, and at last did attain to a pretty certain conviction that she was wrong; but the misery remained. It was there, like a dead, leaden weight at her heart. She might argue away her first impression—the first subtle intrusion of the idea, or the shadow or the ghost of the idea, 'false, but she could not get rid of the wretchedness caused by the fact that the idea had intruded —that something had happened so strange as to open the door for it to enter by.

She tried to paint, but could not. She passed a morning of misery—heavy, unrelieved, and indescribable. When she returned to Avice, she found her too dejected, puzzled, unhappy.

'I don't want to go,' she said. 'I don't know what Jerome means, or wants. If I go to England, he ought to come and fetch me.'

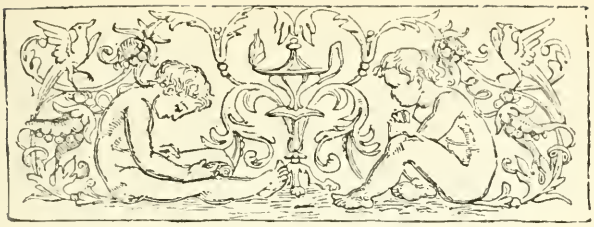
He had said no word of coming, as Sara remembered, with a heartache.

'He wrote in haste, and promised to let us hear again,' she replied. 'There is sure to be a letter to-morrow explaining.'

'I don't see how it is to be explained,' said Avice, despondently. 'But if Jerome thinks he can tyrannise over me, he is mistaken.'

Her lips closed one upon the other with an expression of obstinacy.

'Hush! as if he had any thought of such a thing!' said Sara, coldly; but this exchange of ideas had not resulted in lightening the heart of either one or the other of them.



CHAPTER VII.

'AN ENEMY HATH DONE THIS.'

THE postman did not call at all the following morning, and Sara, she scarcely knew why, felt sick at heart. What a martyrdom those four or five postal deliveries per diem of a great town may and do inflict upon some of those who are eagerly waiting for *something* to come, and it never appears. The postman goes past, or calls, with terrible regularity. Scarcely has one bitter disappointment been tided over, than one sees him again, with the bundle of letters in his left hand, passing along the street, or running up the steps.

There is the sharp fall of a letter in the box, the sickening interval before the servant comes in with the salver, and on it a circular, an invitation, a bill—never the thing one is longing for so desperately. Under the circumstances, give us rather by all means the one delivery during the day of the dark and barbarous village which is five miles from everywhere. There one is at least secure of an interval of twenty-four hours between each ordeal.

Dinner, their midday dinner, was over; and the afternoon was advancing. Sara could not paint; so, saying she had a headache, she did not enter her studio, but remained in the other room with a book. Ellen and Avice were both in the atelier. Ellen with her sewing, which she usually took there when her mistress was not painting, and sometimes when she was. Avice was painting. She had a very pretty talent for making water-colour drawings; and Wilhelmi, out of his regard for Sara, had given

her a few hints on different occasions, by which she had not failed to profit.

Thus Sara had her book, her parlour, and her thoughts to herself, and felt the monopoly to be of anything but an exhilarating character. She scarce saw the printed page; she was so engrossed in her wonder as to what had really been in Jerome's mind when he wrote her that letter, and by the bitter sense of indignity she experienced in the utter silence of to-day. Not a line; not a word from him. It was amazing — incomprehensible! She had not answered the letter. She was wondering whether she should do so, whether she should wait another day; in the hope of hearing from him that he had been hasty, ill-advised; that he had decided not to let his sister return with Father Somerville.

Then some one knocked at the door, and in answer to her *Herein!* Rudolf Falkenberg entered.

'Send me away if I disturb you,' he said, pausing, and looking rather doubtfully at her.

'Not in the least. Pray come in, Herr Falkenberg, and try to instil some of your wisdom into me, for I am a very foolish person.'

'As how?' he asked, taking a chair near her, when she had given him her hand; 'and what has happened, that I find you sitting here in the middle of the afternoon, like——'

'Like a banker on his holiday, or a lady of independent means, or some other equally enviable person,' said Sara.

'You will own that the position for you is an anomaly, at least.'

'I suppose it is. I cannot paint to-day. I have other things to think of.' Her face clouded. 'I am going to lose my dear little companion.'

She told him this as a fact, though she had been debating within herself whether to wait till she heard 'certainly' from Wellfield.

'Miss Wellfield! Is she going?'

'Yes. Her brother is ready for her to

come home, and as a suitable escort offers, he has sent for her.'

'I see. And that will leave you alone.'

'When she is gone, and you are gone, I shall be quite alone.'

She looked at him as she spoke with a frank, unconscious regret, openly expressed in her glance, and in the tone of her voice, before which he averted his eyes. It was at moments like these that he felt the 'burnt fingers' he had pictured to himself, give twinges and pangs of pain which were hard to bear without either word or exclamation. *Tout vient à point à qui sait attendre*, had been a favourite proverb with him, and he still believed in it a good deal, though he was aware, as most men and women who have passed the boundary of youth must be, either from observation or experience, that these trite, dull, hackneyed proverbs have a trick of realising themselves in a fashion the reverse of delightful. 'Everything comes to pass for him who knows how to wait for it.'

But how does it come to pass? The oracle sayeth not, and he is a fool who asks. 'And he shall give them their hearts' desire'—another poetical, grandiloquently sounding promise. But how do they sometimes receive their hearts' desire? Often in such fashion as to break the heart that has been waiting and desiring so long.

'I am the bearer of an invitation to you from Fräulein Wilhelmi,' he said, not answering her look and tone of regret. 'Or rather, I might say, a mandate—a command.'

'What sort of a command? Luise wishes to command everyone,' said Sara, with a languid smile.

'She has arranged some private theatricals for to-morrow evening, and——'

'Does she wish me to take part in them?'

'No; only to be a guest.'

'And to see her and Max Helmuth in them. I shall have to ask you to make my excuses, Herr Falkenberg. Until Avice has

gone, I shall not go out. She leaves at the end of this week, and I cannot leave her.'

'I think you have ample excuse, certainly; though of course I should wish, so far as I am concerned, to see you there.'

'Thank you. Luise's parties have been a different thing since you did come. I often wonder she does not get utterly wearied of them — I don't mean that I feel myself superior to such things, but the monotony of it all. Luise goes very little away from home, and while at home there is scarcely one night without some entertainment, either at her father's house, or some one else's. She sees the same people; hears the same jokes, the same stories; dances with the same partners; receives the same compliments. It must be unutterably wearisome.'

'Why so? In it she is fulfilling her vocation, just as much as you by studying art fulfil yours.'

'Does she? That never struck me. What do you call her vocation?'

'To please and attract is her vocation, to become an expert in which she has studied diligently and practised laboriously since she was a mere baby, and that under every kind of circumstances, and upon every variety of subject.'

'It is true. And she is very fascinating, without doubt.'

'She is.'

'Since she practises upon every variety of subject, I suppose she has practised upon you? Has she succeeded?'

'In winning me? Yes. I have been her slave for many years; that is, when I saw that it was necessary to her self-respect that I should bend the knee before her, I bent it, and have enjoyed the greatest amiability and kindness from her ever since.'

'Oh—that! I don't call that being won, said Sara, with rather a disdainful curl of the lip.

'No? What, then, is your idea of being won?' he asked, as he trifled with the

leaves of a plant standing in a pot near to him.

'In the case of a man or of a woman, do you mean?'

'Of—say of a man.'

'Well, Luise has not won you. Have you read any of Browning's poetry?'

'Very little. Why?'

'There is a little poem of his about wearing a rose. It concludes:

'"Then, how grace a rose?
I know a way.
Leave it, rather,
Must you gather;
Smell, kiss, wear it, and then throw away."'

'That is severe,' he said.

'But true. And you are no more won by Luise than the man who could so write of a rose was won by it. But that is not the way in which she has won Max Helmuth. And she does not care to win any other in that way.'

'I believe you are right. She has more

power than I thought. Then do you think she could really win me in the end ?'

'No; I should think not,' said Sara. 'I know some one who, I think, would be much more likely to win you.'

'Who ?' he exclaimed, so eagerly that she looked at him in surprise. He was skirting dangerous ground, and he knew it and enjoyed it.

'Avice Wellfield, if she were old enough.'

'Miss Wellfield ?' he echoed, and looked at her with a look she did not understand. 'Miss Wellfield before Fräulein Wilhelmi, certainly. Yes, there is a wonderful charm about her. If you were not so strict in your definition of "won," I should say she had won me already by the mystery and poetry which seems to envelop her. But you will not allow me to say "won," of a feeling like that. In the same way,' he continued composedly, 'I should say that you had won me long ago by your simplicity.'

'By my simplicity ?' echoed Sara, not

giving a thought to the serious and decidedly personal turn the conversation was taking; feeling only that it was a pleasant break in the far from easy or pleasant current of her reflections while alone.

'Yes; your almost classical simplicity and freedom from every sort of affectation—a simplicity which extends to your whole nature, and which is so engrained that you are quite unconscious of it. My telling you of it will not cause you to lose it. I defy you to lose it. I should not wonder if some day it led you into doing or saying something which conventional people would call outrageous.'

'You are remarkably candid this afternoon,' she said, much amused. 'I do not see why you should have a monopoly of it. I will tell you what it was in you that "won" me, as you call it.'

'And what was that?' he asked tranquilly, though he knew that never in his life before had he been on such dangerous and difficult

ground. The temptation of hearing her tell him that she liked him, and why she liked him, was irresistible.

'First, the unconsciousness with which you wore your riches and your celebrity—for you are celebrated, you cannot deny it; and next, your trustworthiness.'

'Trustworthiness!' he echoed, as she had done.

'Yes; you are trustworthy. "My telling you about it will not cause you to lose it. I defy you to lose it. I should not wonder if some day it drove you to doing or saying something which more conventional people would call "—foolish.'

Sara smiled a little as she looked upon him from her deep eyes, and Falkenberg answered the smile with a thrill of exquisite pleasure. It was sweet indeed to know this. 'Two can be steadfast,' as he had more than once said to himself. These words of hers simply confirmed his love, strengthened his purpose. He would still wait. If he waited

long enough, the day might come on which he might be able to serve her.

'Why, you give me a *quid pro quo*,' he said. 'I did not know you could make jokes.'

'Do you call that a joke? Perhaps I am not so "simple" as you think me. Perhaps Luise Wilhelmi and I are in one another's confidence.'

'Upon what?' asked Falkenberg. He was leaning forward, his face resting upon his hand; his beautiful, steadfast brown eyes looking directly into hers. He paused in this attitude, waiting for her answer, and, during the pause, the door was opened, and Ellen said:

'A gentleman, ma'am, to see you.'

She put a card into Sara's hand, upon which card its owner instantly followed. So quickly, that, when she had perused the words:

'The Rev. Pablo Somerville, S.J.,
Brentwood College,
Lancashire,'

and raised her eyes, he stood before her, bowing, and regarding her piercingly, but not in the least obtrusively, from his deep-set, inscrutable eyes.

Sara rose instantly, a deep flush mantling her face, which flush Somerville did not fail to note ; while Falkenberg, whose composure when he felt himself *bien*, well-off, at his ease, it was almost impossible to disturb, merely raised his head, and transferred the gaze of his calm brown eyes from Sara's face to that of Somerville.

Sara was deeply disturbed and surprised. The visit was totally unexpected, on that day at least. Like a flood there rushed over her mind the miserable conviction that Jerome had behaved at any rate with unpardonable carelessness, if not with deliberate intention of wrong-doing. She knew nothing of how far this man was in her lover's confidence (and Somerville had no intention of furnishing her with any information on that point). She had not had time to consider and decide

whether she should receive him cordially or otherwise. All this gave embarrassment and uncertainty to her manner, and made it quite unlike her usual one; while Somerville, as will readily be supposed, was as perfectly, as entirely self-possessed and at his ease here as in the Lecture Theatre at Brentwood, or pacing about the garden at Monk's Gate with Jerome Wellfield, and recommending him to marry Anita Bolton,

Being a very clever man, he had formed a theory of his own with regard to Sara, when Jerome had told him her occupation and given him her address. He had instantly imagined that she was the woman to whom Wellfield was 'in honour bound.' Now that he saw her, he was convinced of it, and he was not going to give her any assistance by making casual observations. All he said was:

'I fear I come inopportunely.'

'I heard of your intended visit to Elberthal, Mr. Somerville, but had no idea you

could be here so soon,' she replied, distantly.

'My business in Brussels and Bruges was over sooner than I expected,' was the courteous reply, as he took the seat she pointed to. 'Mr. Wellfield asked me to call here immediately on my arrival, and said he would write to you.'

'Yes, I have heard from him,' replied Sara, reflecting with a cruel, bitter pang on the strange style of that communication, distracted how to act. Somehow she could not accept as final Jerome's letter of yesterday. She still clung to an idea—a hope that she should hear from him countermanding the abrupt mandate. But she could not betray as much to this priest, for, from his entire manner, it was evident that he at least was following up arrangements which had not been contradicted.

'I thought it best to call now,' pursued Somerville, pleasantly, perfectly conscious of her disturbance, 'as I am absolutely obliged

to leave for England the day after to-morrow, and felt that you ought to be informed of the fact.'

'The day after to-morrow? Mr. Wellfield in his letter spoke of the end of the week.'

'When I left Brentwood, I quite supposed it would be the end of the week. But I am not my own master in this journey. I am under instructions.'

'Which, of course, have to be obeyed?' observed Falkenberg, nonchalantly.

'Exactly so,' answered Somerville, turning his eyes upon him with the rapidity of lightning. Falkenberg met them with the same utter calm and unconcern. He had not moved from his chair close to Sara's side.

'Mr. Wellfield's last wish would be to hurry or incommode you,' continued Somerville, again turning to Sara, 'but if Miss Wellfield could be ready by the time I mention——'

'Miss Wellfield will be quite ready when

she is required to go home,' said Sara, with crushing coldness; her pride in mad rebellion at what she called to herself the insolence of this strange man in telling *her*, of all persons, what were Jerome Wellfield's wishes in respect to his sister.

'Here is Miss Wellfield herself,' she added, as Avice came in, and she introduced her to Somerville. Avice looked and felt cold and constrained, though Somerville's charm of manner soon removed her objections to him personally. He began to talk to her, pointedly going into details about her brother, and his great desire to see her and have her with him again, which details soon began to interest Avice exceedingly. Sara writhed (mentally) at this conduct, yet she could not speak, for from all Somerville's demeanour she came to the conclusion that, however friendly Jerome might have been with him, he had not confided to him the fact of their engagement. It was therefore perfectly natural that the priest, if he were unaware of

this, should look upon the sister as more interested than the friend, and should turn to her with all his remarks and details.

Somerville himself saw it all, and his own reflections were :

'*Mon Dieu!* A rare piece of pride and beauty, I must own. He might well turn upon me in the way he did when I suggested his marrying the little Bolton heiress. This is a prize not lightly to be resigned, though I think his hold upon it now is loose enough. How she chafes at the treatment she has had lately, and what would not this other man give if he could carry her off? Well, perhaps his wish may be gratified. I am sure I have every desire to further it.'

By-and-by Ellen brought in coffee, and while they were drinking it, Wilhelmi and his daughter called. Introductions and explanations followed, given by Sara in the coldest of cold tones ; but Wilhelmi, seeing only some one in some way connected with his favourite pupil, invited Somerville to spend the

evening at his house, and Luise, perceiving an opportunity of maintaining her self-respect by captivating a stranger, added the prettiest entreaties, and the invitation and the entreaties were accepted by the object of them. Sara steadily refused to leave her own home until after Avice had gone, and Luise, her attention diverted by Somerville's appearance on the scene, was less insistent than usual when her will was crossed.

Then they all went away in a body, not without Somerville's having observed that Falkenberg lingered behind the rest to touch his hostess's hand, and look earnestly and inquiringly into her face. His lynx-eye saw the faint, sorrowful smile which answered that look ; and as he went away, he said triumphantly in his heart :

'The way is clear, friend Wellfield. Surely you would not be so selfish as to stand between her and such a marriage as is waiting to be accepted by her!'

CHAPTER VIII.

FATHER SOMERVILLE GATHERS THE THREADS TOGETHER.

SARA had a short visit on the following morning from Father Somerville, paid ostensibly for the purpose of telling her his arrangements, and asking if Avice could be ready by a certain hour on the following day.

'Yes,' replied Sara; 'if you will be at the *Bergisch-Märk'sche* station at the hour you mention, Miss Wellfield and my servant will meet you in ample time.'

Somerville's countenance changed a little.

'Surely there is no need for you to incon-

venience yourself by parting with your servant,' he began.

'Allow me to judge what is necessary. Miss Wellfield will not leave me except under my maid's care, who will see her to her brother's house, and can then return to me.'

He bit his lips and apologised, saying that no doubt Miss Ford was perfectly right.

In the evening, despite her protestations against it, she was made to go to the Wilhelmis'. Luise 'made a point of it,' and Sara, weary of striving, and wishing also to avoid painful conversation with Avice, who insisted upon having all kinds of messages given for Jerome, who she was sure would be dreadfully disappointed if she presented herself to him without such proofs of affection—Sara, sad and spiritless, went about eight o'clock to the big house in the Königsallée.

All the beautiful rooms were thrown open: there was talking and laughing, music and dancing going on. As Sara entered, looking pale and indifferent, but splendidly

handsome, as usual, in her cream-coloured cashmere and pale roses with glossy leaves, Luise Wilhelmi came dancing up to her, looking sparklingly beautiful, and glowing with life and excitement. She was followed of course by her gigantic Max, smiling, handsome, devoted, ineffably happy, as usual.

'Oh, Sara, your Father Somerville is delightful!' exclaimed Luise. 'I have quite lost my heart to him. If he were not a priest I should run away with him—do you hear, Max?'

Sara saw nothing in this even to smile at. What was a light jest to Luise Wilhelmi, was deadly pain and misery to her. Max Helmuth laughed a mighty, not very meaning laugh. Was he not in honour bound to laugh at all the jokes or would-be jokes of this sprightly little lady, who, so everyone said, was so much cleverer than himself?'

'Look how amiable he is!' pursued Luise; 'even making himself agreeable to the poor Goldmark there.'

Sara turned hastily, and looked across the room to where indeed Somerville was seated beside Frau Goldmark; his pale, handsome face leaning a little towards her, in marked contrast with her flushed excited countenance.

'Really, Luise, I wonder that Frau Goldmark persists in coming to these large parties under the circumstances!' she exclaimed involuntarily,

'It does look rather odd, doesn't it? But who would grudge her a little amusement? she will soon have to work hard enough.'

'Certainly; but I think if my husband had been dead not six weeks, and I had cared at all for him, I should not be very anxious for amusement.'

'I think Fräulein Ford is right,' said Max, audaciously hazarding an independent remark.

'Max! He only says that because he has the greatest veneration for you, Sara, and thinks all you say and do is right.'

'Does he?' said Sara, with rather a feeble smile, while her eyes wandered restlessly around, as they had done ever since her arrival. 'Ah!' she added, a light breaking over her pale face, 'there is Herr Falkenberg; I wondered where he was.'

He came up to her and shook hands, and remained beside her. Luise and Max moved off, she lightly leaning on his arm and whispering in his ear:

'*Nun, mein Lieber*, what do you think? Will you still say there is nothing between them? Did you not see how dismal she was—quite *verstimmt*, I declare, until Falkenberg came up, when in a moment everything became *couleur de rose*. As for him, I really begin to think that the unapproachable and fastidious Rudolf has fallen a victim at last.'

'And what wonder?' murmured Max, peaceably.

'Not much, I confess. But say what you like, it is a tremendous match for her.'

'Why so tremendous?' inquired Herr

Helmuth, who appeared not quite so complaisant as usual this evening. 'I am sure even Falkenberg never met a more beautiful or charming woman.'

'*Even* Falkenberg! I can tell you, Herr Bräutigam, that if it had not been for a certain long-legged, stupid fellow, who has not a word to say for himself, and on whom I took pity because I could not bear to see him look always as if he were on the brink of tears or suicide—if it had not been for this fellow, I say, who put me into this predicament, *I* would have shown you whether *even* Falkenberg was impervious to everyone except a stony Englishwoman like Miss Ford.'

Highly delighted, and completely restored to acquiescence and submission, Max laughed again, a mightier laugh than ever, and they repaired to the dancing-room.

* * * * *

Father Somerville had a very long conversation with Frau Goldmark, relating

entirely to Miss Ford and Herr Falkenberg. He had won her heart by telling her that at Brentwood there was a small but beautiful picture of her husband's—a St. Agatha.

'Ah, *die heilige Agathe!*' replied Frau Goldmark, artlessly. 'Yes, a very handsome housemaid of ours sat for it—an *Elsässin, die* Lisbeth. It made a beautiful picture.'

This opened the way to a conversation about the pictures in general of the late Herr Goldmark, then to a description of the *lebenden Bildern*, and the pictures in which Sara Ford had taken part: to the fact that in 'Yes or No' she had looked so beautiful, that Herr Falkenberg had bought the picture the very next morning.

'Oh! he bought it, did he? That is he, I think, talking to Miss Ford now.'

'Most certainly, that is he. He appears to spend most of his time in talking to Miss Ford. We have all come to the conclusion that the only thing which keeps him so long in Elberthal is Miss Ford's presence.'

'Ah! you think he wishes to marry Miss Ford.'

'It looks like it. What is quite certain is, that she would be overjoyed if he asked her.'

If Frau Goldmark could have caught the expression in Father Somerville's half-veiled eyes at that moment, she might have changed her opinion as to his extreme affability. The look said: 'How dare a little insect like you presume to pass judgment on that woman!' The man had no good designs towards Sara and her happiness. She stood between him and the accomplishment of a purpose which had now crystallised in his mind into a set scheme and plan, which he was resolved to do all in his power to carry out; but though he would crush her himself, and smite down her life, no spite would enter into his arrangements. He perfectly comprehended what she was, and knew that had he been other than he was, he would have sacrificed all he had for the chance of winning her; he knew that she had about as much desire to captivate

Rudolf Falkenberg as he had himself; and he knew that the woman beside him had a small mind which could not rise to the level of those who had roused her enmity, by first doing her great kindnesses, and then, perhaps, snubbing her a little.

That was nothing to the purpose. He encouraged Frau Goldmark to ramble on, giving him one proof after another of the attachment existing between Falkenberg and Sara. The latter he felt to be a mistake. Sara did not love Falkenberg—she loved Jerome Wellfield; but the former he believed and grasped at. Every sign of devotion on Rudolf's part put a weapon into his hands for the furtherance of his plan. He heard glowing accounts of Falkenberg's riches and great possessions; of his status in the world of finance; of his interviews with royal and imperial personages and their ministers; of what changes a word of his could work in the state of the *Börse;* in short, every word that Frau Goldmark said convinced him that here

was a splendid alliance, waiting for Sara Ford to ratify it ; that nothing prevented that ratification, except the insignificant fact that she was bound to Jerome Wellfield, and, incidentally, of course, that she loved him as her life.

He left early, excusing himself on the plea that he had to travel early the following day, and that he had one or two important letters to write that night—which was true. He repaired to his hotel, to his own room, drew out writing-materials, and wrote :

'DEAR WELLFIELD,

'I am going to send this off by the midnight post, and as it is now nearly eleven, I have not too much time. By doing this, you will receive it twelve hours before my arrival with Miss Wellfield. I called at Miss Ford's house yesterday, and found her at home. Do you know, once it came into my head that Miss Ford might be the lady to whom you told me honour bound you, but I

very soon abandoned that idea, for all the world credits her with being betrothed, or about to be betrothed, to Rudolf Falkenberg, the great Frankfort banker. You know whom I mean. If I may judge from my own observation, I should say report was right. He was sitting with her when I arrived, and I saw that I was unwelcome to both. He certainly pays her most devoted attention, and she, I should imagine, was far from feeling indifferent to him. These envious German women say: "What a match for her;" but I think you will agree with me that an Englishwoman like Miss Ford (for I take it for granted that you do know her pretty well) is more than worthy of anything that any man of any nation may have to offer her. She certainly is a magnificent being. But enough of this. Your sister will no doubt regale you with the same news, for she appears devoted to Miss Ford. The latter sends her maid to travel along with Miss Wellfield. I suppose we shall

arrive at Wellfield about five in the afternoon. I have been wondering how your affairs are progressing. How glad I should be to hear on my arrival that the thing I so wish for were accomplished, and that you had decided to take that place which you assuredly ought to have. Well, I shall soon see you, I suppose. By the way, on our way through London we shall call at the Great Western Hotel to breakfast or rest, that will be the morning of the day after to-morrow. If you have any communication telegraph to me there. Time presses, so, until I place Miss Wellfield under your brotherly protection, farewell.

'Yours ever,

'PABLO SOMERVILLE.'

Somerville himself sallied forth with this to the General Post, ascertained that it was in time for the night-mail, and that it would reach its destination on the following evening. Then he returned to his hotel, sighed,

undressed, stretched himself upon his couch, and slept that sleep of the labouring man, which we are told is sweet.

Sara Ford, too, had left the party early, and, accompanied by Falkenberg, had walked home. They maintained an almost unbroken silence till they arrived at the great doorway of her home. Then they paused, and Falkenberg said :

'After to-morrow morning, I suppose, you will be alone for a few days.'

'Yes ; till Ellen can go to Wellfield, have a night's rest, and return to me.'

'Then I must not call so often, I fear.'

'Perhaps it will be better not. This place is a very nest of gossip and scandal, and though I do not ever allow such things to interfere with anything I may choose to do that I feel to be right, yet I never could see the sense of going out of my way to make them talk. But should you have any reason for calling, Herr Falkenberg, or anything particular to say to me, pray defy the gossips of

Elberthal, and come. I shall be only too glad to see you.'

'Thank you. And—forgive me. From things you have said to-night, I fancy you are in some trouble of mind.'

'I am,' she answered briefly.

'Will you remember that I am your friend and servant, and that any service in my power, I would render you with delight, whether it gave rise or not to gossip?'

'Thank you. You are a friend indeed. If I require help or counsel, I will come to you. But so long as I can, I must fight out my trouble alone.'

They exchanged a handshake, and separated; he to go back to the Wilhelmis', and bear his part as best he might in the merriment; she to her room to slowly undress, and bitterly to decide that to write to Jerome under the circumstances was out of the question, to realise with a rush, the great, sad change and dreariness which had suddenly crept over everything, and to

recollect Rudolf Falkenberg as one lost in a wilderness recollects some group of strong, sheltering trees, seen on the far horizon; distant, but safe when one should attain them.

CHAPTER IX.

ABSCHIED UND RÜCKKEHR.

THE morning dawned, and brought the hour at which they were to be at the station. There was the brief time of waiting there, the averted eyes and stealthily-clasped hands. The train came in—another long clinging kiss; then a brief, noisy interval of bustle and shouting —a last wave of the hand from Avice—a last glimpse of Father Somerville's pale face and deep eyes—then they were gone, and she returned to her 'sad and silent home.'

The travellers were to arrive at Wellfield

late on the afternoon of the following day. Ellen was to have one night's rest, and to return on the following day to Elberthal, so that Sara could not expect to see her until the third evening after the day of departure. It is best not to go into the history of those days—those three nights and four days which Sara spent by herself. It is enough, that as each day went by, and brought neither word nor sign from Wellfield, she felt her heart wither and die within her. Hope was quenched. She did not hope for Ellen's return, but she looked to it for information: Ellen would perhaps have made some observation, would have learnt something as to the reason of all this strange mystery, which, while it lasted, so bewildered her that she scarce knew whether she was in her sane mind or out of it. She scarcely hoped for an explanation; she did not see how the case admitted of one, but she waited—waited with a forced patience, a false quiet, which forced her to put an almost unbearable strain upon

her nerves, and which consumed her like a fever. She would not reproach; she would not accuse; she would wait, wait, wait, she said to herself, a hundred times, and this waiting was eating out her heart, while her pride was humbled to the dust.

On the second afternoon, Rudolf Falkenberg called. He started when he saw her.

'Miss Ford! You are ill. What is the matter?'

'I am not ill, only a little headachy and nervous. I want to see Ellen, and hear that Avice has arrived at home.'

His heart was wrung, but he could not say more; he saw from her manner that she was in no mood for conversation, friendly or otherwise. He went away with a sense of deep depression hanging over him; a disagreeable *Ahndung*, as if some thunderstorm lurked in the atmosphere, ready to burst upon and annihilate all around.

'On that fourth day—the day of Ellen's

return, Sara verily thought once or twice that she was going mad. The horrible strain and tension; the dead, unbroken silence, suspense, waiting; the horrible conviction, which yet she could not prove without this eternity of waiting, that she was being slighted, insulted, betrayed; it formed altogether an ordeal more scorching than any of which her philosophy had hitherto even surmised the existence.

At length, in the evening, she heard a step on the stair; the door was opened, and Ellen entered, looking utterly broken-down and exhausted.

'Ellen!' she exclaimed, starting up, and fixing dilated eyes upon her; 'are you ill?'

'I'm not very well. Excuse my sitting down, Miss Sara. I can stand no more. I'm not a good traveller, you know, especially by sea.'

'Poor old Ellen! I'll get you some wine. Loose your shawl and your bonnet-strings.

Did you get a rest at Wellfield? Did you stay all night?'

'Yes, ma'am; I stayed all night. I might have stayed longer if I'd chosen to. Miss Wellfield begged me to remain another day.'

'But you preferred to return to me?' said Sara, her hand trembling so violently as she poured out the wine, that she had to desist.

'I did, Miss Sara. I could not remain there.'

'Not remain: why?'

'I did not like the things I heard there; and besides, Mr. Wellfield gave me a letter for you.'

'Oh! where is it?' she almost panted.

Ellen opened a little handbag which she had beside her, and gave Sara an envelope which she took from it. Sara opened it, read the words contained in it, and looked blankly round, with a face which seemed in a moment to have turned ashen-grey. All the days of

preparation, of suspicion and suspense, had been powerless to diminish the force of the blow when it came.

'My God!' she whispered, crushing the paper in her hand, and then suddenly dropping it from her fingers as if it scorched or stung them.

As Ellen came nearer, alarmed from her weariness, Sara put her hand upon the woman's shoulder, grasping it with a grip of iron, and confronting her straitly, said:

'Tell me the whole truth. What have you heard? What has happened? What did you hear of or from Mr. Wellfield, that made you wish to leave? Speak out, Ellen—the whole truth.'

'I heard that he was engaged to the young lady at the Abbey—Miss Bolton.'

'And do you think it is true?'

'I do, ma'am. Miss Wellfield did nothing but cry from half an hour after the time we got into the house. When she said goodbye to me, she said: "Tell Sara—no, I

can send her no message; I am not fit to look at her again—none of us are!"'

Her arm dropped from Ellen's shoulder. She put her hand to her head.

'Where is the letter?' she said, wearily. 'Oh, here!' And she stooped forward to pick it up; but, as if growing suddenly dizzy, dropped upon her knees, stretched out her arms, and would have fallen had not Ellen, running up, caught her, and pillowed her head upon her breast.

'My poor child! my darling Miss Sara! Oh, my dear young lady, don't take on so. 'There isn't a man worth it in this world . . . Well, cry then; it will do you good.'

But Sara made neither moan nor cry. For a short time, at least, she had in unconsciousness a respite from her woe.

'That man is a devil,' observed the old nurse beneath her breath. 'I suppose he has looked after his miserable *self*, as men always do; and my young lady may die or go mad of

it, for aught he cares. I hated him from the first moment I saw him, with his soft voice and cruel eyes.'

END OF VOL. II.

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